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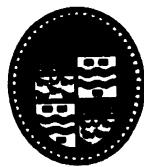
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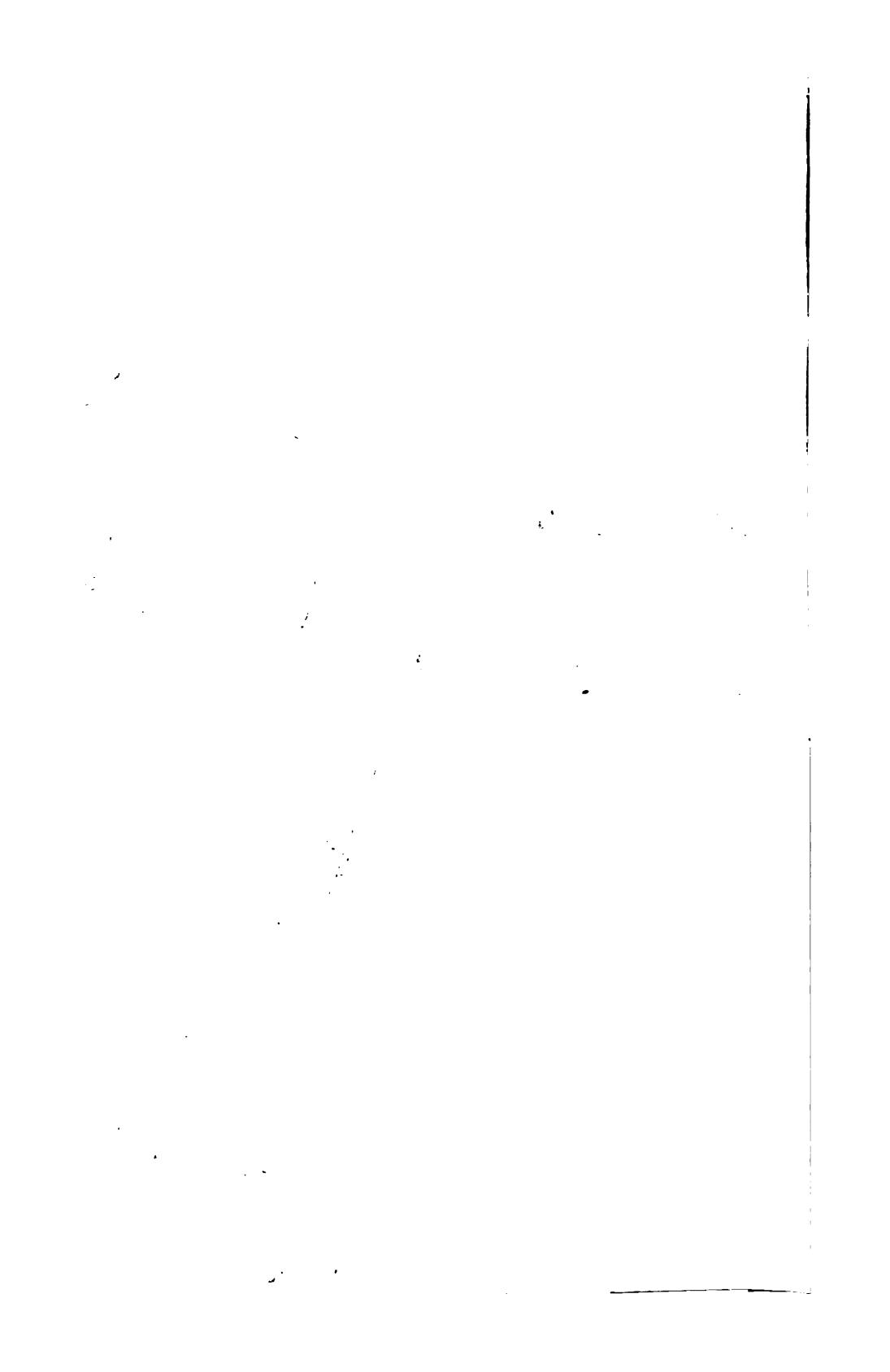




SIR MICHAEL PAULET.

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VOL. I.



# SIR MICHAEL PAULET,

A NOVEL,

BY MISS ELLEN PICKERING,

AUTHOR OF

“ NAN DARRELL,” “ THE FRIGHT” “ THE  
EXPECTANT,” &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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# SIR MICHAEL PAULET.

## CHAPTER I.

IT was a day of early summer—such a summer as, believing the reports and traditions of our respected great grandmothers, we may imagine to have graced the year 1745.

The sun was rising high in the azure heavens, for it was not yet mid-day: the motes danced lightly in its beams—the cattle lay quietly ruminating beneath the shelter of woods, or stood with sleepy eye in the tranquil stream—the

melody of the birds seemed richer, though more subdued than had been their morning song—a golden light lay on the nearer sloping greensward, melting into a silvery haze in the far distance—the butterflies flitted from flower to flower, now nestling in the cup of one, now hovering above another, whilst those very flowers, the trees, the grass, all nature's self seemed clothed with more than usual beauty, as if rejoicing in this summer sun, and wooing it to shed a brighter glory still. Earth, air, and sky appeared instinct with joy—not a rude, boisterous, boorish joy—but a calm, softening, and heartfilling joy: a tranquil rapture felt, but not told—soothing, refining and delighting—driving away all petty cares, stilling the restless spirit's strife, and winning all things that had life to peace and hope. The very fawns bounded more gently on the velvet turf, or rested with a quiet grace beside their dappled mothers; and there was music in the low rustling of the leaves, and music in the chirp of the gay grasshopper.

Beneath a stately beech was grouped a subject for a painter's canvass. One in the bloom of earliest womanhood sat on a rustic bench, half shadowed by the overhanging boughs that screened her from the mid-day sun, though here and there a golden gleam pierced through the leafy network, shedding a glory, as a poet or a lover might have deemed, around her beauty, for she was more than passing fair—a being to be looked upon again, and then again ; and ever to be found more lovely still.

Her skin might have rivalled the opening snowdrop, whilst her cheek, with its healthful glow, mocked the bloom of the early peach. Her eyes, of a dark, grey, shadowed by long lashes, were full of winning softness, whilst her mouth, with its rich coral and half pouting lips, seemed formed to say all that was sweet and kind. Her hair, through which some golden threads appeared to run, was mostly gathered up under the flat gipsy straw hat, tied negligently under the

chin ; but some few long, rich curls were floating over neck and shoulders, as was the fashion in the later years of Queen Anne, a fashion still retained by many in the reigns of her two successors; the cardinal, made of a light silk, was thrown carelessly down on the bench beside her ; and there was nothing to conceal the exquisite symmetry of her arms, displayed by the tightly fitting sleeve, and the smallness of the rounded waist set off by the full hooped petticoat below. The dress was of a rich material, and being rather short, after the manner of that time, showed the slender foot, with its high-heeled shoe and neat gold buckle ; and scarcely within the bounds of merry England could have been found a prettier and more fairy foot than that which peeped from under the dress of Frances Evelyn, being shown a little more than usual from the position of its owner.

At her feet lay a young man of about two and twenty, frank, gay and impetuous withal,

to judge from the merry smiles on his lip, and the occasional flashing of his hazel eye, though that eye showed more of softness than of fire, whilst gazing on his fair companion. Instead of showing favor to any of the wigs of that day, the bob, the tye, or the Ramilies, he wore his own dark brown hair unpowdered, after the fashion of many of the young men of that year, arranged with such evident taste and care as bespoke the youth to be somewhat particular as to his personal appearance, if not in general, at least on the present occasion ; and, in sooth, if a handsome, pleasing face, and graceful figure might excuse a little coxcombry, then might Leonard Greville claim his pardon. The richness of the lace on his ruffles, and the embroidery on his waistcoat bespoke him a gentleman, in those days when distinctions of dress were as marked as the distinctions of rank, whilst the sling which supported his left arm, a slight scar on his forehead, and a certain something in his air betokened the soldier who

had seen service. At a little distance, on the root of a neighbouring oak, sat a middle aged waiting maid, whose endeavours to look more than usually grave and unconscious, whilst occasionally glancing at her young mistress, and the youth at her feet, would have afforded amusement to any observer, who could have paid heed to the prudent tire-woman whilst in the presence of her lady. She had chosen her position most judiciously ; near enough to appear as a sort of chaperon, yet too distant to occasion a feeling of restraint, should the young couple, by any chance, say aught which they would not have said before the whole congregation of the parish church, though with her quick eyes and ears she reckoned on seeing and hearing enough to enable her to understand how matters stood, and form a tolerable guess as to how they might stand. It was not the first time that Leonard Greville had joined Frances Evelyn in her walks by accident, a paling alone dividing the park of his uncle from that

of her father; and Martha Sturt considered herself well skilled in all matters which she counted belonging to the duties of an attendant on a very young and lovely mistress, without sister or mother; and who, in her opinion, might reckon her lovers by the score, and wait if she chose to the hundredth, without any danger of remaining unmated at last.

There was room enough on the bench for Leonard to have taken a seat beside the lady, but either he thought it showed more respect and gallantry to place himself at her feet, or he fancied that in that position he could the better gaze into her fair face, marking the dimpling smile round her rosy lips, and how beautifully the long dark lashes lay on her rounded cheek, as her soft eyes sank beneath an intruding sunbeam, or it might be beneath his admiring gaze, for that ardent, yet respectful gaze was not quite unmarked, as might fairly be inferred from the half averted face, and slightly heightened bloom, whilst that it was not resented

might also be guessed from her figure being slightly inclined towards him, even whilst the face was half turned aside.

There was silence between them for a time, not the silence of moodiness or want of thought, but a silence befitting the quietude of all around them. They too were filled with a gentle joy, which boisterous mirth, or even a merry laugh would have seemed to mar.

The lady was the first to speak; perhaps feeling the awkwardness of silence and his earnest gaze; and her tones were soft and sweet, as the summer breeze on some flowery bank.

“Have you fairer scenes abroad, Captain Greville? I know not why, but to me this sloping green, that crystal stream, and those woods beyond never looked more lovely.”

“Nor fairer scenes, nor fairer maidens,” replied the youth in a voice which seemed to have won music from hers, glancing as he spoke from the fairy foot, which was unconsciously

playing on the greensward, to the rosy lips which had uttered tones so soft, so witching.

“ Nay, Captain Greville, I asked not for flattery,” answered the lady colouring slightly —it might be at the words—it might be at the look.

“ I gave no flattery; I gave but the truth,” said the young soldier earnestly. “ Flanders has not a scene so fair as this; and for her maidens—they—”

“ Are beautiful, no doubt: but we will not discourse on them,” said Frances quickly, closing the sentence with a still higher bloom; and adding with a consciousness which she could not control: “ you are not looking at the landscape as I prayed you. How bright and lovingly the sun rests on those fine old woods, and how the river sparkles as it flows along.”

“ Ay: how well the Hall stands out among those woods, as though their ruler and their king. I never saw the home of my forefathers look so venerable, nay nor so joyous either; it

hath flung off its winter gloom, and donned its summer garb of joy, as if to greet a bride. See how the sun is gleaming on it now! It only needs that fair young bride to make it all it should be."

"Persuade your uncle to fulfil this fancy: he would play bridegroom well."

"Now heaven forefend! The bride I spoke of should be mine—of my own choosing. The old Hall merits a fair mistress—doth it not?"

"It has your cousin:—will not that suffice?"

"What Nella? Ah, poor Nella! An orphan from her birth. Her father died upon the battle-field—her mother followed as she first drew breath. Stinted in growth, she can be bride to none, and is no fitting mistress for that ancient Hall. No: I would give my mother's home a mistress fairer, ay, and dearer too."

"And would you be equally bountiful to the Moat, that stands out so boldly to the right?" enquired Frances quickly, looking away in growing confusion.

“ No : I detest that Moat ! hate its defying strength ! ay, hate its very name. It doth not bear an honest look.”

“ Nay, now you slander the poor house,” said Frances smiling. “ To most it wears a grand and noble look.”

“ But not to you :—say this, for I would have our likings and dislikes the same. Say you detest the Moat.”

“ First give a reason why I should.”

“ Because I do—I would that you would think that cause enough. And will you not?”

“ You must first tell me why you hate the Moat. It is an ancient house, belonging to an ancient family, graced as they tell me by heroes and fair dames.”

“ Shamed by dark deeds and bloody tragedies. But few of its inheritors have died of age or in their beds. One fell beneath the dagger of an outraged wife—one by a brother’s hand from jealous rage, both loving the same lady—two fell upon the battle-field ; and one

was lost at sea. The superstitious say there is a curse upon the race, and not a Paulet shall have a peaceful death until the lands pass into other hands."

"So I have heard before. But should we credit these strange tales?"

"It is a fiery race; and, therefore, may work out the doom predicted."

"Have you no other reason for your hatred of the Moat?"

"I have."

"I thought as much," observed the lady with a smile.

"Perhaps you may have heard as much," said Leonard searchingly.

"Only a vague report which may be true or false."

"Tell me its purport, that, if true, I may affirm it; and if false, deny it."

"Nay, it was no such mighty thing that you need heed it, Captain Greville. Only an idle tale about an idle youth, who would have robbed

a nest at dusk, and found himself, he scarce knew how, within the moat."

" Heard you no more than this?"

" But little more, save that the youth was nearly choked with mud—or wrath."

" That was your merry brother's tale—my life upon it!" exclaimed Captain Greville quickly, and colouring all the more from his fair companion's quiet smile. " Did you not hear how, stripling as I was, I wrestled with the full grown man, who bade me—go—then tried to force compliance to his mandate? And heard you nothing of the dark woman who came up but just in time to save my life?"

" No: tell it me all," cried Frances eagerly, her look of gentle raillery exchanged for one of such deep interest, as was most flattering to the youth. " Is it not true that you went forth to rob a nest?"

" I must own to that, I conclude," replied Captain Greville, with a smile; " but Sir Francis

Paulet, the owner, being from home, no other had a right to forbid me."

"Who did forbid you then?"

"I knew not then, I know not now. It was dusk when, marking an owl fly out of an oak, not far from the Moat, and conjecturing that it had a nest in the clustering ivy, I climbed the tree in haste, without noting whether I was alone or not. Just as I had descended with a young owl in my hand, I was roughly grasped by a stranger, wrapped in a long dark cloak, who demanded, in an insolent tone, what right I had to be there?—then, before I could answer, bade me begone, in a tone still more insulting, muttering the words 'young thief,' and 'spy.' Never over-patient under irritating language, my reply was none of the mildest; but what seemed to enrage him the most was my alluding to his flapped hat and wrapping cloak, as means of concealment adopted by one who had good cause to dread recognition. He raised his arm

to strike me, then lowered it again with a scornful remark on my youth and fragile make. My spirit was above my size, and provoked beyond all prudence I rushed upon him. We wrestled for a minute, and no more, for I was but a boy, and he a full grown man; and what could rage achieve against his strength? He threw me to the ground, and kneeling on me bade me sue humbly for his pardon. I felt his weight on my chest—his grasp upon my throat—I saw his fiery eye balls gleaming on me through the gloom, and heard his muttered words of wrath—I could scarce breathe—the shudder of approaching death came over me, and yet I would not sue for life to him. His grasp grew tighter, and I felt my senses failing. A hand was laid upon his arm, and I then felt relieved.

“Would you kill for a sharp word? Would you have the murder of a stripling who has done you no harm, on your conscience?” cried a voice by his side. “Let him go in peace—

there will be blood enough on your hands ere you rest in the grave."

"I meant not to kill, but the boy was insolent," replied my oppressor, as he rose up slowly, leaving me free, but exhausted.

"Ay, many a one has gone a mile, who at starting intended to go but a step," observed my preserver reprovingly, adding as she pointed to the house, which rose from the surrounding moat as a mass of black, standing out from the dark grey sky behind. "There have been deeds done there which none in their youth dreamt of doing. Better if all of the name had been strangled at their birth."

"You are friendly to the house of Paulet," observed the stranger with a sneer.

"The curse of their own evil deeds is upon it; not one of the race shall die at peace in their beds as a christian man should."

"Prophesy better things than this, or not at all, old hag."

“ I do but repeat the words of one long since in her grave—the words of one who died by the hands of a Paulet.”

“ To die in my bed were but little to me, I would rather the trumpet should ring in my ears, or the wild waves dash over my corse.”

“ The body shall rise from the sea, or the land at the day of doom, and the soul shall behold its evil deeds set forth in words of flame,” said the woman solemnly.

“ Have done with thy prating,” exclaimed the stranger impetuously. “ And get thee gone, boy, unless thou wouldest like another tussle,” he added turning towards me.

“ As you will,” I replied, though I could scarcely stand. “ Remember I sued for no mercy.”

“ And therefore the more dost thou merit chastisement. A ducking may cool thy hot blood,” rejoined the stranger with a laugh.

His touch was too light to have moved me a step at another time, but exhausted as I was by

my recent struggle, the push sent me reeling into the moat.

“ That was unwisely done and may be rue'd hereafter,” observed the woman, advancing to the edge of the water.

“ Let the future look to itself! for the present, my hand can always guard my head. But the moat is too shallow to drown the youth, and I should be vexed if it did; nay, would venture my life to save his were there need, for I never intended him any such grievous harm; but my wrath was aroused, and I needed some object to spend it on. One foot is on the bank even now; we may leave him to himself,” said my enemy turning away.

“ Yes, his life is not to be taken now:—you will meet and contend again hereafter; it may be once—it may be more, when the boy hath grown into the man.”

“ And I shall be victor again: add that, thou prophetess,” exclaimed the stranger quickly.

The woman's reply was lost in the distance,

for she too had walked away ; and when I had freed myself from the mud and slimy weeds which lay at the bottom of the moat, and climbed to the top of the bank, the strangers were hid by the surrounding wood ; and neither then nor afterwards could I find any trace of their name or movements."

" Did you make many enquiries, and a very strict search ?" enquired Frances with increasing interest.

" As many enquiries, and as strict a search as I could venture on without revealing the whole affair, which my boyish vanity forbade."

" And have you never seen either since ?"

" Not to my knowledge, and though eight years have passed since we fought, and his hat was slouched over his eyes, yet I think I should know him again if we met. Some secret instinct would point him out as my former foe. He was tall, with dark, fiery eyes, and that was all I could see."

" And the woman—what was she like ?"

“ The darkness, and her cloak, the hood of which was drawn over her head, precluded my judging of face or figure, even had not my exhaustion prevented an accurate survey. Her words were more solemn and appalling from the cold and passionless tones in which they were uttered. They seemed rather the words of an oracle, not to be moved by human prayers, than of a living, feeling being. At the moment, I would have given my left hand to hear who should be victor in our future strife; but the single word rival, and my oppressor’s laugh, were all that I heard.”

“ Do you think he intended your death?”

“ I thought so then; but my cooler judgment acquits him of this. Perhaps, as he said, he had been roused by another, and so spent his anger on me; and, but for that woman, in the blindness of his fury, my death would have followed. I owe him no thanks for my life.”

“ Did you think him the owner of the Moat?”

“ Most assuredly not. I knew the person of

Sir Francis too well to have been mistaken. He died in a storm at sea, as you doubtless know, about two years since."

"Have you heard who is owner now?"

"Scrimshaw himself did not know a few months back; Sir Francis was never married, and the next heir is supposed to be in Virginia, if alive, which is doubtful, having left England for America, many years since."

"And have you never formed a guess as to the name, or condition of the stranger?"

"I have no clue whereon to found even a conjecture; but I have blanched your cheek with my tale, and can assign no reason for revealing to you what I have so long kept secret from all, save your brother, who gave you, it seems, only his own merry version of the common report. I spoke from a sudden impulse, urged on by your praise of the Moat. You now understand why I hate that house."

"It is a strange, and fearful tale," said Frances with a shudder.

“ It is. Pardon my thoughtlessness in telling it, and let us converse on other things.”

“ Yes, let us talk of Henry: I never grow weary of talking of him,” replied Miss Evelyn with a brighter look.” You tell me that he is good, and brave, and handsome—all that a sister could desire. No wonder that I love to hear you talk—what loving sister would not do the same?”

“ And do you only love to hear me talk when I converse of him? What if I told you of myself?—my hopes? my feelings? Would you not listen?”

“ I must in courtesy,” said Frances after a pause, looking away.

“ Only in courtesy?” pleaded the youth, gazing more earnestly upon her.

“ Tell me more of my brother. Did he not send me some message?” answered Frances evasively.

“ He did. He bade me say, if I could win your love, that he would rather see you

Leonard Greville's bride, than wedded to the  
richest lord in all the land."

"I did not ask you to invent," replied the  
lady in a low, sweet voice, that had no anger  
in its tones.

"I speak the truth, and nothing but the  
truth. You cannot doubt my love."

"You have not been in England long; and  
I was absent when you came. Such sudden  
fancies are like fragile flowers, blooming to-day  
and gone to-morrow."

"A sudden fancy! you should know me  
better. My heart was yours before I went  
abroad."

"Some three years since, when I was but a  
girl. I am a woman now."

"Ay, and a lovely woman too. I felt it  
even at our first meeting, and dared not call  
you Frances, as of old. You have the power,  
but not I trust the will to torture me. You  
know I loved you ere I went away—you knew  
it by my parting song, if by no other token.

You heard and did not frown ; nay, turned away with a sweet blush, and let your hand linger in mine, when I took leave. The curious eyes and ears of those around forbade me plainer speech. I will repeat the song, the strain may prove a spell to summon back the loving memories of that past—the past, when we walked hand-in-hand through park and wood."

Without waiting for a reply, Leonard Greenville snatched up Miss Evelyn's lute which had been laid aside at his approach, and withdrawing his wounded arm from the sling, which had hitherto supported it, burst forth at once into the song which he had sung at their parting three years before, watching, as he did so, the face of his fair companion, on which a rich but changeful bloom had replaced the paleness, caused by the recital of his encounter with the stranger. That face was slightly averted, but only slightly ; and though the eyes were bent on the ground it was plain to see that not a

note was lost, whilst the unconscious picking to pieces of a flower betrayed an emotion from which the lover anticipated nothing to pain him. If the singer wanted skill there was a passionate feeling, an earnestness of purpose, which she to whom those words were addressed might well prefer.

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### LEONARD'S SONG.

When day is in its dawn, love,  
    Oh, ever think of me !  
How o'er the sunny lawn, love,  
    We play'd in childhood's glee.  
When summer's sun is high, love,  
    Oh, ever think of me !  
How soft sigh echoed sigh, love,  
    When maid and youth were we.

When ev'nings mist is round, love,  
    Oh, ever think of me !  
How dear each sight and sound, love,  
    That told my heart of thee.  
When night in darkness lies, love,  
    Oh, ever think of me !  
How oft with speech and eyes, love,  
    This heart was vow'd to thee.

In sickness and in health, love,  
    Oh, ever think of me !  
In poverty or wealth, love,  
    Let me be all to thee.  
In sadness and in smiles, love,  
    Oh, ever think of me !  
In spite of arts and wiles, love,  
    As I will think of thee.

---

“ A touching song, and fairly sung.”

The startled singer, and the still more startled lady turned at the words, and then first perceived a mounted stranger standing within a few paces of the former, whose approach, from the softness of the turf, had been unobserved. This sudden turning of her head revealed the whole of the fair face of Frances to the stranger, who, springing from his horse, doffed his hat with marked respect, continuing to gaze with undisguised admiration on the lovely being before him, who shrank from that gaze with a crimson blush.

“ I fear my sudden appearance has alarmed

---

you," observed the stranger, addressing Frances in such softened tones as proved him desirous of winning her favor.

" It is no wonder that the lady should feel alarmed at such an unlooked for intrusion," observed Captain Greville before Frances could reply, not only vexed at the inopportune appearance of the stranger, but still more annoyed at that stranger's steady, and, as he considered, bold gaze at the lady of his love.

" I pray your pardon for the intrusion; but when syrens sing, men must needs be allured."

This stranger was a handsome man with dark hair and eyes, and a complexion bronzed, as it seemed, by frequent exposure to the weather. His frame was large, but well proportioned, and full of grace as well as power. He might be thirty—he might be forty—he might even be more, or less than either, being one of those whose age it would be difficult to determine, for, whilst his manner betokened one who had mixed long in the world, the bright

colour on his cheek, and the still brighter sparkle in his eye told of youth and mirth. His dress, though of English make and material was worn with something of a foreign air; and a very critical ear might have discovered an accent which, though very slight, could scarcely be traced to belong to any of the English counties. Still less did it belong to Scotland, or Ireland; and perhaps might only be caused by the habit of conversing in many languages. His reply had been uttered with a good humour which might have disarmed the resentment of Greville had it not been accompanied by a certain air of superiority particularly displeasing to the hotheaded young soldier, who, under the influence of this feeling of irritation, was disposed to quarrel with this easy-mannered stranger, whose address, to his fancy, showed such a habit of command. The word syren too seemed to his ears like mockery, and his answer was formed accordingly.

“ To work out your own simile; there is danger in listening to syrens.”

“ And therefore the more to my taste.  
Where peril beckons, I follow.”

“ Though it should lead you to trespass on  
private property, and intrude when unwished  
for,” observed Greville haughtily. “ There are  
high roads in England on which strangers may  
travel without fear of hindrance or question.”

“ And saloons where youths may recline at  
the feet of fair ladies, and chaunt sweet ditties.  
If the nightingale sings at mid-day beside such  
high roads, no wonder that curious and admir-  
ing travellers draw nigh to listen.”

“ There is no high road on this side of that  
paling.”

“ But there is on the other, as Diavolo  
found, it costing even him an effort to clear it,”  
replied the stranger in the same frank and  
reckless manner, patting the noble horse as he  
spoke.

“ Then why attempt it?”

“ To say it was my pleasure would be  
enough; but I had another reason beside. I

have lost my way, and would fain enquire the road to the Moat."

"The Moat?" repeated both Leonard and Frances in surprise, exchanging looks of wonder and intelligence.

"Yes, the Moat. Is there any thing fearful, or strange in the question, that you repeat it?"

"There is something fearful and strange in the place, and in those who have dwelt there," replied Captain Greville still more displeased with the stranger, whose admiring gaze had continued fixed on Frances even whilst speaking to her companion.

"Some old woman's tale, I conclude," he observed with the same careless superiority which he had maintained throughout, either not marking, or not heeding, young Greville's displeasure. "Where doth it lie?"

"There! to the left," answered Leonard briefly.

"Ha! a good position, and strongly built;

it would stand a siege," observed the stranger, fixing his gaze on the old house.

"The land is at rest, and there is no talk of besieging the houses of private gentlemen."

"Be not so sure of that, young sir. Ask the King of France whom he wills to be King of England?"

"Rather ask of the people of England whom they chose for their Monarch. We are all loyal subjects here," replied Leonard Greville with a strong stress on the *we*.

"Loyalty! ay, that means siding with the strongest," replied the stranger with a laugh. "But there is little chance, as you say, of the Moat's standing a siege, though stirring times are approaching, and St. Andrew may meet in encounter with St. George, and the Lion and the Unicorn do battle for the crown. Will it please you to point me out the high road to the Moat?"

"Back by the way you entered; and then round the park paling to your right."

“ Round indeed! full five miles at the least, to judge by that belting of trees. The gallant falcon strikes straight at his quarry.”

“ Then your way lies across that river, and over the fence to the west.”

“ I thank you,” replied the stranger with a curling lip, for the first time taking a particular survey of the speaker; his dark eye flashing at that speaker’s brief, bluff words. “ So be it!” he added after completing his scrutiny of Greville, and tracing with his eye the line to the Moat. “ I let no obstacles turn me aside.”

“ Do not attempt to cross the river; its waters are deep and strong,” exclaimed Frances earnestly. “ There is a bridge higher up the stream, and my father, I am sure, would regret, if, from fear of trespassing, you did not avail yourself of it.”

“ Then you are the fair mistress of this fair domain; and you deign to think of my safety,” observed the stranger quickly, turning again

towards her, and speaking in tones subdued to almost woman's softness.

The most courteous gallantry had taken place of his former air of command; but his admiration was so marked and confusing that Miss Evelyn answered more coldly.

“ I can wish evil to none.”

“ No greater evil can befall me in such an adventure than a swim in a cool stream on a summer's day, Diavolo, and I have tempted many a greater than that; and with the favor of so fair a maiden next my heart,” (raising a flower, which she had let fall, with respectful gallantry as he spoke,) “ and with her prayers for my success upon her lips, there is no peril I should count too great to dare. Farewell! it shall not be long ere we meet again,” and springing on his horse after a lowly bow to Frances, he dashed down the green descent, and into the rapid river.

He had not over-rated the powers of his good horse or its rider, both breasted the rapid cur-

rent with strength and judgment, and soon stood in safety on the opposite bank.

“ *Insolent!*” muttered Greville, his hand instinctively seeking the hilt of his sword, as he marked the stranger wave an adieu to Frances, ere he galloped off in a direct line for the Moat, “ He shall rue this impertinence, and give up that flower.”

“ Why care for a discarded flower, taken, not given?” said Frances earnestly, marking his anger with a changing cheek.

“ Your hand had touched it,” replied the lover.

“ My hand has touched a thousand before—may touch a thousand again. That one was despised, faded and torn—a cast-away.”

“ Will you give me one neither faded, nor despised?” cried the eager youth, looking longingly at a rose which she held in her hand.

“ If I do, will you promise to think no more of this stranger?”

“ You are pale! Do you tremble for me, or this bold intruder?”

“ Oh ! not for him.”

“ For me, then, Frances, my own dear love ! Give me that rose, as a token—a pledge of affection ; and I will think only of you.”

The blushing girl turned away from his ardent gaze ; but not in displeasure.

“ Will you not give it, sweetest, dearest ?” pleaded the lover, still more passionately.

The rose was given, though the blushing face was still half averted.

“ And the heart and the hand : you give both with this flower, sweet one. Will you not bless me by saying this too ?”

The reply of the blushing girl was too low to reach even the quick ears of the listening waiting-maid, but Martha guessed, from the lover’s raptures, that its purport had been what he wished, and her countenance showed no little discontent thereat.

“ My young mistress hath beauty, but little foresight to yield so readily. A gift easily

won is soon despised ; and she not nineteen yet. That stranger will see her again—he is bold and handsome, and, to judge by the lace on his ruffles, not scantily furnished with gold. She should have played him off against this hot-headed lover ; for she who hath many strings to her bow must be sure of hitting the mark, and winning a good prize at last. My young lady lacks wisdom—I could have taught her better.”

Such was the inward soliloquy of the prudent waiting-maid, who seemed very much inclined to compel her young lady to what she considered a wise line of conduct, should the chance happen to fall in her way. Martha Sturt was by nature a coquette, and, moreover, considered that the rivalry of contending lovers might prove a matter of profit to herself. A gold piece, or a gold chain might occasionally be given to gain her good word, or learn the movements of her mistress. It is true her coquetry had lost her

more than one good match, but then she was only a waiting-maid, and it was not fitting that her lady, a beauty, and an only daughter, should say yes to the first, or even the second or third who should ask her.

## CHAPTER II.

THE dinner at the Hall had been concluded—the dining hour of that day being near about the luncheon hour of the present—Nella—the poor cousin of whom Leonard had spoken to Frances, had quitted the room; and the uncle and nephew were left to themselves.

“ It might be as well if young men studied the balance of wine, as well as statesmen the balance of power,” observed Mr. Hartnell, the owner of the Hall, in a cold and rebuking tone.

Young Greville started, thereby upsetting

the whole of the contents of the glass, a portion of which had before been spilled from his awkward manner of holding it.

“ I beg your pardon, sir: I was not thinking of what I was about,” observed Leonard in confusion, endeavouring to remedy the mischief as well as he could.

“ So I concluded,” replied his uncle drily. “ Doubtless you were thinking of the best method of stopping the French conquests in Flanders: a fitting consideration for an ardent young soldier who longs to return to his regiment.”

“ My regiment is expected home to protect England from the invasion threatened by the Pretender, and I was not then thinking of my military duties.”

“ Perhaps you were thinking of nothing, a favorite employment among the young men of the present day,” remarked Mr. Hartnell in the same cold, unvarying tone, a manner which was always more provoking to his over-hot

nephew, than the occasional bursts of passion to which Mr. Hartnell was subject.

“ I beg your pardon, sir ; but I was thinking of that on which my whole happiness depends —to obtain which there is no sacrifice which I would not make.”

“ Indeed ! Is it a horse, a hat, or a pair of point ruffles for which you have so desperate a longing ?”

“ Neither, sir, neither,” exclaimed his chafed nephew impatiently. “ It was Frances—Miss Evelyn—of whom I was thinking.”

“ I forgot to name a young beauty among a young man’s longings. Have you written a sonnet on her eyebrows, or only on her lap-dog ?”

“ Neither, sir ; I love her—love her passionately.”

“ Passionately ; yes, that is the proper phrase for a lover. Let me see how long one takes to fall in love passionately. You have been in England about a month, half of which time, if I remember rightly, you were confined to

the house from the effects of the wound for which you obtained leave of absence."

"I have seen Miss Evelyn almost every day for the last fortnight," said Leonard colouring.

"Then I am to consider a fortnight the proper time for becoming desperately in love."

"I loved her before I quitted England."

"Some three years since, I think. She must have been about fifteen then, and you about eighteen. Did you not love her passionately whilst in your cradle?"

"I have known her from the time that I was seven years old, sir; and—"

"Loved her passionately ever since. I thought as much," observed his uncle, closing the sentence.

"I did not say that, sir, exactly."

"No: only meant it."

"Her brother has been my constant friend from boyhood."

"If young men were obliged to marry the

sisters of all their friends, I fear it would tend to the introduction of polygamy."

Leonard looked vexed and disconcerted; then, summoning all his courage, proceeded with a mingling of timidity and abruptness that spoke his emotion.

"I hope, sir, you do not object to my union with Miss Evelyn,"

"I seldom give an opinion till I know the grounds on which that opinion is to be based. Have you spoken to her father, or only to the lady? Of Miss Evelyn's consent I conclude you are certain, as young men, however hot-headed, but seldom boast of their passionate love to their uncles or guardians till the time has arrived for speaking of settlements."

"I have not yet named the subject to Mr. Evelyn holding it a point of affection and duty to mention it first to you, sir; but his daughter returns my love, and is ready to give me her hand."

“ That is if no other suitor should appear between this and the wedding day.”

“ Frances could not be false, sir,” exclaimed Leonard impetuously, provoked by what he considered a sneer.

“ Miss Evelyn is a woman. Keep down that hot spirit, young man, and never trust any beyond what you cannot avoid. I thought the same at your age, but I was only a younger son, and Miss Hesketh preferring an elder brother broke off her engagement to me, and married the heir of the Hartnells.”

“ Miss Evelyn is incapable of such baseness,” cried Leonard warmly.

“ Tut, tut, boy. I have long ceased to believe in exceptions. Learn wisdom from the experience of others; it is less painful to acquire such knowledge by proxy than in your own proper person.”

Leonard was silent. The advice seemed given in kindness; and his uncle’s confession that he

had himself so suffered, checked all anger at a doubt of Miss Evelyn's good faith. He had before heard from others a hint of his aunt's transfer of her hand from the youngest to the elder brother, and heard it assigned as the cause of Mr. Hartnell's cold manner and cynical mood; but never before had his uncle openly alluded to the wrong done him in his youth. Pity and respect kept him silent; for to attempt consolation to a man of such a temperament, and after so long a lapse of years, he felt would be ill-advised. Nor could he, indeed, divine exactly what were his uncle's feelings on the subject; for his voice had been steady, his look unembarrassed, and his tone cold and precise as usual. Either time had worn away his pain, or his pangs had been lighter, or his self-command greater, than Leonard had imagined possible.

Mr. Hartnell was the first to speak, and from his words it appeared that his thoughts had been

bent on the advantages of the match to be formed by his nephew, not on the suffering caused by the one broken off with himself.

“ Mr. Evelyn is a saving man—it runs in the family—his grandfather made his fortune by saving more than by speculating, and before his time the Evelyns had only a farm of two or three hundred acres; but an old miser, liking his saving disposition, left him his hoards, which enabled him to purchase their present property from its spendthrift owner, and vie with the Hartnells and Paulets, who have been the leading families in the county from the time of Edward the First. The girl’s mother too came into some property which was settled on the younger children, and must come to her; and this, with her father’s savings, should make her a handsome fortune. Then the young man is brave you tell me, and there may be sharp work yet in Flanders. If Captain Evelyn should fall, she will—”

“ Heaven forefend!” exclaimed the warm

hearted Greville, shocked at this cold blooded calculation on the death of his friend. “ I should be utterly unworthy of the love of Miss Evelyn could I thus count on the fall of her brother.”

“ This is a waste of warmth. I never charged you with the wish, or a purpose of hastening his death, but merely spoke of the probability of such an event in the common course of things, he being a young, and high spirited soldier,” observed his uncle in the same calm, measured tone, utterly unmoved, as it seemed, by Leonard’s indignant burst. “ The speaking of such an occurrence will not hasten it, and in matrimony every contingency should be estimated. As I said then, if Captain Evelyn should fall, his sister will be an only child, and of course an heiress; and even without this, her fortune will be considerable—her family is respectable, if not as ancient as ours—we are neigbours; and it is better to marry in the county, and keep up county interest. All things considered,

you could scarcely have made a better choice."

"I am glad you think so," said Greville briefly, for there was something so displeasing to the lover in summing up all the worldly advantages appertaining to the match, and leaving out all the perfections appertaining to his mistress that he could not compel himself to say more.

Either Mr. Hartnell had grown more sordid during his nephew's absence, or this calculating spirit struck the young man more from his having been of late unaccustomed to its display.

The uncle proceeded without waiting for further comment.

"Mr. Evelyn is cautious, timid, and nervous to such a degree, that it is sometimes difficult to bring him to a decision, but in the present case there can be no reason for deliberation. People are divided as to the cause of this nervous timidity; some attribute it to delicate health, whilst others affirm that it arose from the hard-

ships of his youth, for he was disinherited at one time by his father. He himself speaks only of his delicate health, never on any occasion recurring to his early life, and seeming to shrink from any allusion to the past. There is a timid terror about him at times, as if he feared that a crime or a ghost should rise up before him. His wife was fortunately a sensible, strong-minded woman, or the children would have been poor things, brought up by such a nervous invalid. With some matches he might require a month to make up his mind, but a Hartnell, and the heir of the Hall need fear no hesitation. Of course I shall make fitting settlements on my nephew and successor, and Mr. Evelyn must do the same."

"Thank you, my dear uncle, I owe every thing to you," exclaimed the grateful Leonard, forgetting in Mr. Hartnell's promised generosity concerning the settlements his former vexation at that gentleman's worldly thoughts and worldly calculations.

“ You have not much of your own certainly, Leonard, a bare two thousand pounds : and Mr. Evelyn might not deem that sufficient in this son-in-law. My sisters formed most unwise connections. Married for love they said, and had well nigh died of starvation. A pity that your uncle Humphrey left no son ; and then the estates would have descended in the male line, as they should. Your elder uncle had no children ; a punishment, as some asserted, for supplanting me with Miss Hesketh ; and I was too old when I came into the fortune to run the risk of being jilted again. You must take the name when I die—the Hall must belong to a Hartnell. It is provoking enough to have no heir in the male line, and Mr. Greville was not a fit match for my sister, in family or fortune ; which is why I declined all intercourse with his relations. Of course you give up the army at once.”

“ I never thought of that,” replied his

nephew, whose meditations had been hitherto confined to the perfections of his lady-love.

“ I concluded as much : the young never look to the future till experience has proved the insufficiency of the present. You entered the army against my wish, and your marriage will be a good excuse for leaving it. Resign your commission immediately : your passion for Miss Evelyn has doubtless superseded your passion for arms.”

“ There is but one difficulty, sir. To leave the army suddenly, now that there is the almost certainty of a landing in Britain of either the Pretender or his son, might look like cowardice.”

“ Rather like prudence, to the right judging. The only male heir of an ancient house, even though not in the male line, must not risk his life like upstarts, or younger sons. Besides, this threatened invasion is but rumour as yet ; and I am not to be crossed on this point. As the head of our house my will should be law.

As you have settled it with the young lady, perhaps it may be as well if I settle all things at once with her father; that is as far as his natural indecision will allow. He cannot object to your fortune, for I shall make it such as befits the heir of the Hartnells, and equal to that of the heiress—it may be sole heiress of the Evelyns; but there is one point on which I shall insist. Just before his death, being in great distress, old Tupper sold West Mead farm to Mr. Evelyn at a less sum than I had offered him years ago; but having been struck by my father, whilst a boy, he made a vow at the time to annoy the whole family as much as possible, and consequently refused to sell me the land. It can be of no use to Mr. Evelyn, being situated quite away from the Grange, between the Hall and the Moat, and ought of right to belong to the Hartnells, or the Paulets:—it would form a valuable addition to the property of either. I have long set my heart on possessing it, and shall now secure it."

“ I do not anticipate any opposition from Mr. Evelyn, sir, who has known me from a boy, and ever shown me the warmest regard.”

“ You are always counting on the regard of men, and women too: this is a very boyish trick. If it is their interest to serve you they will do it; if not, look to yourself, and count not on others.”

“ I cannot take so gloomy a view of mankind, my dear uncle.”

“ The young never can unless prematurely wise, and even I scarcely count that a blessing, though such wisdom might have saved me from being jilted. Self-interest is the main-spring of civilised society, and you had better learn this from my precepts than the practice of others.”

“ But your own practice, my dear uncle, is against this. You have cared for Nella and myself, poor, penniless orphans, almost from our birth, putting my very paltry patrimony out

to interest, whilst supplying my every want; and now you further the first wish of my heart, engaging, unasked, to bestow such a fortune upon me as may warrant my asking the hand of Miss Evelyn. And yet I have nothing to offer in return save gratitude. This at least must be disinterested affection."

"No, Leonard, but little of that. You and Nella were my sisters' children; to send you forth into the world as beggars would have brought discredit on our name. You are my heir, in default of a better, and must be treated as such. Had either of my brothers left a son you would have had to make a fortune, instead of receiving one."

"I will not believe this," said Leonard warmly.

"As you please," replied his uncle indifferently, and yet, as his nephew fancied, with some slight touch of feeling. "The young never believe the plain truth, though easily borne

away by every glittering falsehood; but I may as well ride over at once and settle all needful preliminaries about this wedding. West Mead must be annexed to the Hall. Ring the bell, Leonard, and order the horses."

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### **CHAPTER III.**

WHILST the uncle and nephew were thus discussing the marriage of the latter in the dining room, Nella Wilmer was left to herself in the saloon, a large and handsomely furnished apartment, befitting the wealth and ancient family of the Hartnells. It had been the habit of Nella, in former times, to sit by herself, either in a favorite nook in the fine old gallery, or in a small room opening from it, which had come to be denominated hers ; but since her cousin's

return from Flanders she had more frequently occupied the saloon, at least since that cousin had been well enough to quit the dressing-room, where she had officiated on his first arrival as head nurse.

Mr. Hartnell had furnished his niece with every comfort and luxury befitting her station, but there had never been any communion of feeling between them; there was the bond of relationship, but not the bond of affection. He was neither harsh nor unkind, only cold; and she, whilst ever gentle and dutiful, obeyed without loving. She was a female—the child of a sister, not a brother; and could not, therefore, perpetuate the name of the Hartnells, which he openly avowed to be his

“Being’s end and aim.”

Absorbed in this one, to him, great object, the presence of his niece afforded him little pleasure, and Nella, conscious of this, rarely entered that presence, but when necessity required her

to do so. Without being absolutely inhospitable he was decidedly unsociable ; and when guests were invited to the Hall, which was very seldom, it was more from some idea of its being a duty arising from his station, than any pleasure he found in receiving company, or in offering those neighbourly attentions in which kind hearts so much delight.

Some averred that this unsociable disposition had existed from his birth, and accounted for, if it did not actually justify, Miss Hesketh's transfer of her hand to his more frank and warm-hearted brother ; whilst others attributed it solely to this blighting of his youthful hopes, and his subsequent struggles to win an independence, his pittance as a younger brother having been very scanty. Both suppositions to a certain extent might be correct. This cold and unsociable temper might have been natural, and only nursed into greater strength by the disappointments of his youth.

To ascertain the original cause of this un-

sociable temper was a matter of little moment, enough that the temper existed, and that by none were its effects more painfully felt than by Nella, who had never quitted his roof, even for a day, since her birth; and who was thus cut off from all intercourse with those of her own station, sex, and age, since the very few guests whom she saw at the Hall were all middle-aged gentlemen, Mr. Hartnell seeming still to consider her quite a girl, and never inviting ladies to the house. When Mr. Hartnell gave dinners, or walked, or talked, or wrote, it was for a purpose—to cover some loss, or gain some profit, at least so he asserted, and those who heard his assertion appeared to believe it, or acted as if they did, treating him in exactly the same spirit in which he openly professed to treat others, thus confirming in his opinion the truth of his declaration, that self-interest was the sole moving principle of civilised society. Had any one hinted that the high-minded and generous were naturally disgusted

by his cynical manner and worldly maxims, he would have been astonished, and perhaps incredulous.

Not that Mr. Hartnell ever committed what might be called a shabby, or even an unhandsome act; such would have ill suited the descendant of a long line of gallant ancestors, and the owner of the Hall and the largest commoner's estate in the county; but by his own showing his conduct was never influenced by any generous or ennobling purpose. Even his family pride was a low and vulgar feeling, based on the known number of his ancestors, not on their worth. The Hall must belong to a Hartnell, because it had continued to do so for some hundreds of years, and no sacrifice seemed too great to effect this object; but of any feeling of affection for the fine old place as the scene of his childhood, and the childhood of his father he never spoke—perhaps because he never felt it—perhaps because he dreaded ridicule if he should name it.

Leonard Greville was a fine, handsome young man, and as his uncle had said, in default of a better, was to be the heir, so Mr. Hartnell could feel proud of him ; but there was nothing in his niece to make him feel proud of her ; on the contrary, for years after her birth he never looked at her without a feeling of shame and irritation. Born when her mother was stricken even to death, from the sudden announcement that her husband had fallen in battle abroad, for months it was doubtful whether she would survive the succeeding hour, and years elapsed ere any entertained the hope that she could reach the age of womanhood.

The hope !—and who entertained the hope ? Not the proud owner of the Hall, who could discover in the puny babe no trace of the beauty for which the Hartnells had been distinguished —no doting parent, and no doting grandam, for she had neither ; none hoped—none feared for the sickly infant except its nurse, who had been much attached to Mrs. Wilmer ; and of later

years it might be Leonard Greville, who, even as a boy, touched by the patient endurance of the neglected child, would try to please and amuse her after a fashion of his own, rarely failing to bring her a present on his return for the holidays, and calming as well as might be his school boy restlessness whilst with her, selecting such subjects of conversation as he judged would interest her most. If the most ardent gratitude could repay this boyish kindness it was repaid a thousand fold, for Nella would have laid down her life to save her cousin from one moment's pain.

Nor was he without a further reward, for as the child grew into the woman he found her not only willing, but able to enter into all his hopes and feelings, being quick of apprehension, and, in most instances, wise in judgment beyond her years and experience, some natural instinct seeming to supply the latter. To her had he confided his ardent longing for a military life—to her had he poured forth his visions of

glory—his aspirations after fame, and in her had he found a sharer in his youthful enthusiasm, though her cheek had grown pale at first, from the thought of his certain danger and possible death. It might almost be said that they had studied military tactics together ; for together had they read all the military annals which he could collect—together had they traced armies, step by step—followed each movement of the siege, and joyed or grieved with the conquerors or the conquered, as the case might be.

The stories related, by Nurse Lee and others, of her gallant father, might have contributed in some degree to Nella's military ardour ; but if her cousin's taste had been for the sea instead of the land, for peace instead of war, it is doubtful whether her enthusiasm would not have been nearly the same : it was the person who had excited this enthusiasm more than the subject. Except Nurse Lee, Leonard Greville, as we have already said, was the only human being who had ever shown her anything even

approaching to affection ; and had he only exhibited the smallest interest in her welfare, neglected as she was, she must have loved him for that, for her young heart pined for something on which to rest ; but showing as he did the warmest regard, making her a sharer in all his youthful hopes and fears, no wonder that she loved him with a strength of which neither, perhaps, were fully aware, pouring on him the devotion of her heart—the treasures of her mind. He was her latest thought at night—her first thought in the morning ; and save her God he was her all in earth and heaven.

Others had divers objects on which to rest their hearts and minds—she had but one. Others had many friends and relations who smiled upon them—she had but one who smiled on her :— others were mirthful and went abroad mixing with those of their own age ; dancing, talking, laughing away the petty vexations of youth ; but she was sad and lonely—never leaving the Hall—never mixing with the young

—never laughing, for there were none to laugh with her; but living in total seclusion as one set apart for scorn or suffering—one doomed from her birth to drain the cup of sorrow to its dregs.

Year after year, the long summer day, and the long winter night, when Leonard was away, she was lonely, companionless, seeing her uncle but rarely, except at meals, when his speech was brief and cold; no wonder, therefore, that she always longed for her cousin's return, as a petted child for its first holidays—as a doting mother for the return of her latest born. When he was at the Hall, she no longer felt desolate—a being cut off from all sympathy with her kind.

Her grief at Leonard's departure for Flanders had been not only deep but lasting, still the hope of his return, crowned with the glory for which he panted, brightened the gloom of her cheerless solitude, whilst his letters, though shorter and rarer than she had anticipated, were

received and guarded as precious treasures. The three years of his absence had made no change in her, save that the powers of her mind had become more fully developed ; she still expected to be the depository of his hopes and fears—the sharer of the first—the soother of the last. She saw that he was grown more manly in person, more polished and easy in manner ; but he met her with the frank warmth of former days—thanked her as he had been wont to do for her careful nursing—made her, as he called it, his sister confessor ; and told her, as she believed, the secret movements of his heart. As long as he was confined by the effects of his wound to the Hall or its garden, she was ever beside him ; or if absent he longed for her presence ; but though he had told her many things, he had not told her all ; there was one secret which he had never named—there was one hope still unrevealed. Poor Nella knew it not ; and she was happy in her ignorance.

Had his niece been beautiful after the fashion

of the Hartnells, her uncle might have overlooked his dislike to her father, who had been guilty of being poor, but being such as she was she could find no favor in his eyes, since her ministering to his family pride, by forming a splendid alliance seemed entirely out of the question. Her living, in spite of all predictions to the contrary, gave him no pleasure—her death would have caused him no pain. She must be supported for the honor of the Hartnells—she need not be loved—that was not in his eyes a family duty.

And what was Nella Wilmer then that she must never hope for a splendid alliance; and that her uncle looked on her with cold indifference, if not with vexation? Leonard Greville had called her stinted in growth—her uncle, in plainer terms, called her—a dwarf.

She was not deformed—there was neither a humpback, nor an over large head, but she was short—very short—scarcely exceeding four feet six; and though every part of her frame was

well proportioned to the others, there was none of the fairy lightness which, as a matter of grace, should have belonged to one of that height. Her foot, though not particularly small for her size, was well formed; her step light yet steady, and her movements were never awkward; but whilst there was nothing in her figure to disgust, there was certainly nothing to admire. Once, when speaking to Leonard, Mr. Hartnell had prefixed the word ugly to the epithet dwarf; but he had done so only in a moment of irritation. She was not beautiful, but her features, if not regular, were intelligent and expressive, wearing such a look of mingled sweetness, energy, and intellect, crossed at times by a shadow of deep sadness, as could not fail to please and touch all who gazed upon her with unprejudiced eyes. There was none of the sharpness and talent for satire too often found among those marked by some natural defect: she was of a sensitive and feeling, not sour temperament; but the former might under

some circumstances cause her more pain than the latter. The seclusion in which she had been reared had prevented her from fully understanding, by comparison with others, how much her diminutive figure must strike strangers. She knew that she was neither tall nor lovely ; but even her naturally strong sense and keen observation did not enable her to see herself exactly as she was. Who does, till the painful knowledge is forced upon him by the sneers and coldness of the worldly, or illnatured ? Thus if her seclusion had caused her many gloomy thoughts, it had also saved her from still sharper pangs, for she was far too sensitive not to have understood a hint, or even a glance. But she might not always live thus secluded, and if she went abroad into the world how much deeper would be her pain.

There was a time when she had shot up so rapidly that the fond old nurse had hoped to see her darling tall and graceful ; but this sudden growth had as suddenly stopped, and

Leonard Greville had found her on his return the same height that he had left her at sixteen. The mind and the heart had grown womanly ; but the stature had remained that of a child.

Her usual manner was tranquil, almost to quietism, so that even Leonard, who knew her best, was not fully aware of the depth of passionate feeling which lay concealed beneath that calm exterior ; and her uncle never even guessed of what she might be capable, if strongly moved ; nor her keenness of penetration on all points over which her feelings threw no veil to blind her judgment.

She had entered the saloon with a thoughtful air, for Leonard had been with her less of late, and, she had sometimes fancied, found less pleasure in her society ; at least he had been silent and abstracted, and there had been a something so different from his usual manner during dinner, a mood and look so fitful and so changing, though her uncle had remarked it

not, that she felt sad and anxious, though she scarce knew why.

For a time she stood looking forth from one of the windows over the flower garden that lay beneath, into the park beyond, bathed in the golden light of summer's sun ; and then, as if pained by the brilliant hues of the former, or the golden glory of the latter, she turned away with a sigh, and seated her herself at an embroidery frame. That happy summer day had brought no happiness to her, for Leonard had been absent all the morning ; and she had half fancied would not meet her eye on his return.

“ But though her needle pressed the silk,”

her heart was not in her work, and the fingers were soon idle, whilst the mind was busy, and it might be the quick ear listening.

The door of the dining-room opened, and she heard the voices of her uncle and cousin in the

splendid hall which had given its name to the mansion, and she bent hastily over her work, whilst a sudden bloom came into her before pale cheek, that faded again as moment after moment passed, and yet she was alone.

At length his step was distinctly heard in the passage, but he came, as it seemed to her, with a slow, reluctant footfall, and her look grew sad as he approached.

Instead of greeting his entrance with a smile, as was her wont, she continued her work without looking up, not even staying her needle, or raising her head when she felt that he was beside her and bending over her.

“ How very industrious you have become, dear Nella ; ever at your needle. One would think, to judge from your zeal, that the fame acquired of old by English damsels for their embroidery, depended on your exertions for its maintenance,” said Leonard gaily, and affectionately too. “ This is too beautiful for an old priest’s cope, even were you a Catholic ; it

would better suit a handsome young soldier for a waistcoat."

" Do you think so?" asked Nella quickly, with a brightened look. " Do you really like it?"

" I were no youth of taste could I do otherwise. Who may count sufficiently on your favor to hope to obtain it?"

" It is for you, Leonard."

" For me, dear Nella! Did you really intend it for me?"

" For whom else should I intend it? who is there beside that cares for me or my work?"

" The first lord in the land might care for such work, and should care for the worker. I count it unequalled in design and execution. Shall I wear it on my wedding day?"

" When is that to be?" asked Nella without looking up.

" Oh! soon; very soon I hope, and trust. You shall have notice enough, I could not be married without you."

Nella raised her eyes to the speaker's face, but her cousin, with a handsome young man's vanity, was so placing the embroidery as to ascertain its effect when formed into a waist-coat, and did not meet her glance.

"And the bride?" said Nella timidly, looking down again.

"Is one worthy my love—not a hundred miles off. You can make no mistake there," answered Leonard gaily. "But come out into the garden, dear Nella; I am too restless, too happy to remain still; and I must have you with me. The embroidery is nearly finished, so the wedding need not be delayed, though you leave it awhile to listen to all my love and my raptures."

"I will go for my bonnet," said Nella rising; and her voice had something touchingly sweet.

"Nay, I cannot wait for that. Let me play tirewoman, and put on this cardinal. There, Nella, look at yourself in the glass; or no, believe the report on my bare assertion. I never

saw you look better in my life: no, nor so well. The brightest rose in the garden has not so rich a bloom, and there is that about you which I never beheld before—a sort of timid, doubtful, yet earnest joy which makes you enchanting. I cannot read your eyes, for you keep them bent on the ground, but every other feature shows a new found happiness; and that hood—I have arranged it beautifully—it is the very thing to half hide, yet set off blushes; and blushes are very becoming, dear Nella; so now let us to the garden—this saloon seems too small to contain my rapture."

Nella smiled so sweet, so soft a smile; so full, as Leonard had said, of a new found joy, that for the instant she looked almost as lovely as the greatest beauty of her race. She was silent; but she hung on her cousin's offered arm with a timid trustfulness far different from the girlish freedom of past times, looking down on the ground, not up in his face, as she had been wont to do in former days.

She did not know how or where he had spent the morning, nor how or where he had spent many preceding mornings; and though his manner struck her as somewhat singular, his words appeared too clear to be mistaken; and there was an emphasis on some of those words which had served to confuse her judgment.

“ What a glorious summer day, dear Nella, is it not?” exclaimed the animated Leonard as he stood, with his cousin still hanging on his arm, in the centre of the flower garden, which was full of rare plants, kept in exquisite order, Mr. Hartnell making a point of this as a matter of pride. “ Every thing seems full of light, and life, and joy. Are you not very happy, Nella?”

“ Very happy,” answered his cousin in a deep, earnest voice.

“ And so am I: the happiest of the happy! I feel as if I had no earthly body, and no earthly care; but was a spirit and had wings—wings fluttering ready for a flight, I really

think I could fly, or something very near it. The birds and the bees are flitting about, why should not we do the same? I am too happy to be still. Come take a fly, or a run with me, dear Nella, you used to be light and swift of foot. Give me your hand."

Nella's joy was of a calmer and more elevated character; she was not restless—she had no desire for motion, and would rather have thought on this joy in stillness and in silence; but Leonard was in a light and buoyant mood, and what he liked she must like too. She had not seen his manner to Miss Evelyn, so timid, so constrained by the very depth of his passion, till he had won his suit; and not having seen this, though rather wondering at this exuberance of gaiety, she could not divine his feelings.

Hand in hand the cousins sped swiftly along the path, Leonard guiding their course towards a large green mount at the extremity of the garden.

"There, Nella, there! I told you we could

fly, or something very near it, let the birds laugh as they will at my assertion. You run famously; as swiftly and gracefully as when a girl," cried Leonard Greville with a joyous laugh as they stood on the summit of the mount.

Nella did not join in the laugh—she rarely if ever laughed—but her bright smile reflected back his joy, for praise from his lips was dear to her heart; even though that praise was only for running; but she did not speak, and Leonard continued in the same gay tone.

"I have read, or heard of some land where the maiden is to fly from her betrothed, and he must catch her, or lose her. Were you in that land, your affianced one need to be swift as the wind, or he would not win you: only then you would be running from, and now you are running with one who loves you, and that might make a difference, sweet coz. Nay, never blush and tremble so, and hold your hand on your heart, as if to stay its beating. Here sit you

down beside me on this soft turf; and I will not speak of my love till you have recovered breath and composure. You are panting even now."

Nella obeyed his playful command, and Leonard took a seat beside her, keeping silence as he had promised; nor did his cousin wish that silence broken. It was joy enough to have him sitting with her hand held in his, as had been their wont in their childish days. He had said enough—more than enough to give her food for happy thought, even though his silence should last for hours. She did not even look at him; but sat with her eyes bent on the ground, weaving such golden tissues of rich joy as youthful hearts so often weave, without one dark thread running through the woof.

Had she been less absorbed in her own bright dreams, she might have wondered at her companion's sudden stillness after his late boyish restlessness; and the intent and earnest gaze which he kept fixed on the entrance to the

Grange, the abode of Mr. Evelyn, which was clearly to be seen from the top of the mount, on which they were seated. She saw nothing of this—she never conjectured the cause of his exuberant gaiety, or why he had brought her thither; and paid no heed to the length of his silence.

“ Ah! there he comes at last,” exclaimed Leonard Greville, starting up as he spoke.

“ Who comes?” demanded the startled Nella, springing up beside him.

“ My uncle, for whom I have been watching so long; and from his manner of riding I can see that all has gone right, and my joy is complete. He has accomplished his mission to his own satisfaction and mine.”

“ What mission?” enquired his wondering cousin.

“ His mission to Mr. Evelyn, concerning my marriage with his lovely daughter.”

“ Your marriage with his daughter!” re-

peated Nella with the look of one who scarce knew what she said.

“ Yes, did not I tell you so before? Or perhaps I forgot it in the wild hurry of my joy; but you must have understood it. What else could have made me so happy, and yet so restless? I was sure Mr. Evelyn would gladly receive me as a son. But how deadly pale you are looking, Nella. I fear the sun was too much for you; and you are panting still.”

“ Yes:—I have been tried beyond my strength. I shall recover soon,” said his cousin gasping for breath—then adding quickly, “ and Miss Evelyn—does she?”

“ Oh! she is mine—my plighted bride. We have pledged our faith this very morning, so you must prepare for the wedding as I told you, and finish the embroidery in time; Frances shall come and give her opinion of its beauty. But I cannot stay prattling with you now, so ask me no questions; you must have

guessed where my mornings have lately been spent: I must intercept my uncle, and learn his news—I cannot wait till he reaches the Hall. So good bye, Nella," and away dashed the impetuous lover across the park, without casting another look on her whom he left standing there, haggard, and heart-stricken.

For some moments the straining eyes of Nella were fixed on the youth as he bounded over the greensward, then, sinking on the turf from which she had so lately risen, she covered her face with her hands. She uttered no cry—she shed no tear, but her body rocked to and fro as if in mortal agony.

It was long ere she raised her head, and when she did, her eye swept eagerly over the whole range of prospect before her, and then became fixed on a figure moving rapidly towards the Grange. It was Leonard Greville, who had so lately sat beside her with her hand in his.

As she thought of this, and the happy day dreams in which she had indulged, a gust of

mingled shame and passion swept over her features; then her face wore the hue of death, and her eyes grew leaden and hollow, as she threw back the hood to catch the passing breeze, hoping thus to lose the feeling of suffocation with which she was oppressed.

The air revived her and she spoke, unconscious, in her strong emotion, that she was giving utterance to her thoughts.

“He is going to her whom he loves—loves!” she repeated with a shudder. “She waits his coming—she will bid him welcome—she will become his bride; and what more have I to do in this world? To finish the wedding waist-coat—to hide my feelings, and to die. There is no one who cares for me now.” She paused a minute, then continued with greater passion. “I did not understand his words—how should I? He never named her. How could I guess where he had been of late, and that his faith had been plighted this morning? He said I was running with one who loved me. Did he

say this mockingly, or did he not think of the meaning his words would bear?—And he could not be married unless I were there. Was this deceit or folly? Should I blame him, or my own heart?—He asked if I was not happy. Yes, too happy then, and now—a blasted tree that cannot bloom again, struck in my youth ere spring had passed. The winter of the heart is come—there is no blossom left. And all around to him is life—and light—and joy. To him—to her: to me all death, and gloom, and misery."

She looked round as she spoke with the heavy eye and contracted brow of one who had lost all hope. Then muttering—"The woods are all too green—the sunshine all too bright—this is no scene to school my heart to bear;" she drew the hood of the cardinal more closely over her face, so as nearly to conceal her features, and then walked towards the house, at first with a hurried step, but as she approached the mansion her manner grew more composed.

No one knew the strength of the mind con-

tained in that stunted form—she did not even know it herself till it came to the proof. The stature of a dwarf—the spirit of a giant—and yet with all a woman's lovingness; and it might be with much of woman's weakness too.

The house was entered with a steady step, but as she reached the foot of the stairs she heard her uncle's voice in the passage. He might call to her—he might speak of Leonard's wedding. She had borne enough for one day. With all the swiftness which her cousin had lauded she sprang up the steps, and rushing into her own room, sank pale and fainting on the bed.

## CHAPTER IV.

“ My darling, my darling, what ails you?” exclaimed nurse Lee on entering the apartment some half hour later. “ You are looking now like your dear mother on her death bed, and but late when you went out into the garden with your cousin, you were as bright and as blooming as a rose; for I saw you go forth, and thought I had never seen you so well and so happy.”

“ And I was happy then, dear nurse: quite happy—And I am happy now,” she added with sudden vehemence—“ happy and well,

why should I be otherwise? Leonard is going to be married, and I must be at the wedding, and finish the wedding waistcoat. I must be well—quite well, and happy too," starting up as she spoke with a strong effort, then sinking back again faint and exhausted.

" My poor child! then it is as I feared," said nurse Lee, bending over her charge with a mother's tenderness.

" What is as you feared?" demanded Nella with quickness, while a faint blush for an instant displaced the paleness on her cheek.

" That you are not as strong as I could wish you, dear child," replied nurse Lee with ready and instinctive delicacy. " I must bring something to revive you."

Nella took what the good nurse brought, then, after a time, spoke again abruptly, though a shudder shook her frame as the words passed her lips.

" You know that Leonard—Captain Greville is going to be married."

“ You told me so, darling ; but do not talk now. You are faint and need rest.”

“ Had you not heard it before ?” asked Nella without heeding this latter caution.

“ It has been talked of in the housekeeper’s room some days,” answered nurse Lee reluctantly.

“ And why did you never name it to me ?”

“ Why should I name what might prove but an idle report, only founded on the young Captain’s being ever at the Grange. Or how should I think that he had not told you himself ? Many a time I have heard him say that he told you every thing.”

“ Ay, all things but one. And I who should have been the first to hear that, heard it the last. You have seen Miss Evelyn—is she beautiful ?”

“ She is fair to look upon,” answered the nurse with some hesitation.

“ Very lovely, dear nurse, is she not ?”

“ Most people think her so,” said the kind

old woman, turning aside as she made the reluctant admission.

“ Ah ! very lovely ; and I am very ugly,” observed Nella with a shudder, and a tone more sad than bitter. “ And all love the beautiful —none love the plain. Ah ! why was I born so ugly that none can love me ?” she added passionately.

“ Hush ! darling, hush ! Do not talk so wildly ; it was God who made you as you are, and he orders all things for the best. He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb.”

“ Ah ! say that again, nurse—say it again. Let my head rest on your bosom as it did when I was a child, and talk to me, as you used to talk then, of the love and mercy of God : but say not that God requires the whole heart. Say not that we must not worship idols—I mean not idols made with the hands, but idols of the heart—say not this, good nurse, at least not now—a little time hence I hope to say it myself ; but now speak only of the love and

mercy of God, not of his threatenings. He would not break the bruised reed. I would be patient and gentle as a little child, so speak to me as you used to do in my childish days, when I laid my head on your shoulder, and felt there was one at least who loved the poor, desolate orphan. But stop—there is one question which I would ask you first—Is she as good as beautiful?”

“They say she is kind,” answered the nurse with hesitation, at no loss to comprehend who was the she intended.

“Kind—only kind! is she good, generous, noble, perfect in mind as in person? Answer me this, and answer me truly,” continued Nella, gazing eagerly into her face. “Deceive me not. You taught me to love truth—let not a falsehood, then pass your lips.”

“She is, I believe, as good as fair,” answered the nurse reluctantly, unable to comprehend the purpose of this eager question, and, therefore,

Nurse Lee could not speak for her choking sobs ; but she pillow'd the aching heart of the suffering girl on her bosom, and Nella was soothed by the tears of affection that rained so fast upon her, so that, after awhile, her own tears fell well nigh as freely.

Never was weeping hailed more joyously than by the watchful nurse, who had marked the growing wildness of her darling's eyes with doubt and fear.

“ Where is my cousin ? ” enquired Captain Greville, encountering nurse Lee on the stairs, as she was descending to the housekeeper's room.

“ Where should she be at this hour, but in her room. It has been dark this long time,” replied the nurse abruptly, endeavouring to pass on.

“ Nella may be in her room, but she never goes to bed so early ; and I must see her, for I have a thousand things to say to her.”

“ I should have thought you had had talking enough to young ladies for one day ; at any

rate you cannot see Miss Nella, for she is gone to bed with a bad head-ache."

"A head-ache! why what can have given her a head-ache?" exclaimed Leonard peevishly, having set his heart on talking to her for the next hour of Miss Evelyn's perfections.

"La! Captain Greville, what strange questions you gentlemen ask. You never can understand that a lady's head may ache, unless it has been shot off her shoulders."

"I should find it much more difficult to understand it then," cried Leonard laughing. "But what makes you so out of humour to-night, nurse Lee, calling me Captain Greville, which you have never done but once since my return; and then only when I put on my regiments to please you? Why not call me Master Leonard, or Master Greville, as you used to do, or even Leonard, without the Master? You are a privileged person."

"You are going to be married I hear, sir, and therefore I must be more respectful, and

“ And feel so too, I should not wonder,” muttered the nurse.

“ Nor I, neither,” said Greville laughing, yet colouring too. “ But how cross you are to-night; and you have not offered me even one good wish.”

“ I am always cross when my darling is ill; but I wish you and Miss Evelyn all the happiness you deserve.”

“ How did you know that it was Miss Evelyn, when I never told you?”

“ Young men don’t go to the same place day after day, leaping over hedges and ditches, to make the way shorter, for nothing; but I can’t stay here chattering, Miss Nella will be wanting me again.”

“ Pass on then; though you might have been warmer in your congratulations, methinks, seeing that you have known me from a boy; but you are a privileged person, and moreover, I am too happy just now to quarrel

with any. So good night; and my love to Nella.

“ Ah! happy! and the happy think little of others. Those who rejoice think more of earth; and those who mourn of heaven. His love to Nella! had he given her that she had not been as she is. But he does not deserve her: no one does,” thought the doting nurse, as she pursued her way to the housekeeper’s room.

Dame Lee was a privileged person, as Leonard had said. Taken when very young to wait on Mrs. Wilmer, before that lady’s marriage, she became devotedly attached to her young mistress, who took great pains with her education, an attachment afterwards transferred to Nella, who loved her beyond all human beings, save her cousin Leonard, regarding her almost as a second mother. From her long service in the family she was sometimes termed old nurse; but she was in truth still under fifty, whilst her superior education, strong good sense, and

honest straightforwardness of purpose, gave her an influence even over the worldly and astute Mr. Hartnell, which was possessed by few. He who suspected all others believed in nurse Lee's disinterested affection for her darling charge, if not for the whole family.

“ What a bright, happy looking morning ! and you hanging over me with such loving eyes,” exclaimed Nella Wilmer, springing up from her pillow, and throwing her arms round her nurse’s neck. “ I have had such dreams ! such joyous dreams, dear nurse ! I was in a beautiful land—so beautiful ! The sunniest summer day does not make the earth look as that looked. And my mother, my own dear mother was there : I knew her at once, though I never saw her. And she loved me—loved me dearly. And Leonard was there,” she added with a faint blush ; “ and my hand was in his, and beside him stood a lovely being, who seemed to me as a sister. And you were there too, dear nurse ; I should not have felt

so happy if you had not been there," said the affectionate girl, kissing her cheek.

" And you were quite happy, my darling ? " questioned nurse Lee, suppressing a shiver.

" Yes, quite happy ! How could I be otherwise ? For all whom I love were there ; and there was not one who looked cold."

" And the land—the beautiful land—what was that like ? "

" Like nothing that I have ever seen—something more beautiful far. All bright and sunny, yet so soft, as though it were lit with a sun of love, not the mere sun that gladdens earth. And before me, leading me on to still greater bliss, seemed a something that had neither shape nor name—a soft, yet radiant glory—a joy filling the whole heart, to which the lips could give no form of speech. I felt as if this mortal body was thrown off, and I, a spirit, winged my way to Heaven. I was so happy, nurse ! so very, very happy ! But you look grave and troubled—frightened—sad.

What ails you, nurse? Do you not like my dream?"

" My darling! my sweet one! God shield you from all ill," exclaimed Nurse Lee, folding her arms, with swimming eyes, round the wondering girl.

" What is it dear nurse?" asked Nella in surprise. " Ah! I am late, and you fear that my uncle will scold. Ah! there was no one to blame or look cold upon me in that happy land. Would I were there!"

" Hush! hush, my darling! You know not what you are saying—what you are wishing."

" It is you, dear nurse, who know not what you are saying. And there are tears in your eyes, and you look quite frightened and sad, as if you feared that I was going to die, or be mad. Why is this? I will be down very soon, and if my uncle should chide I shall not heed it this morning, for my dream has filled me with joy, and I feel as though I should never know grief again. And Leonard never blames

me—never. So dress me like lightning, good nurse."

"Stop! stop, my darling; there is no need for haste. Your uncle has finished his breakfast long since, and I have been sitting beside you these two hours, watching your slumber. No one will chide you for delay."

"Ah! dear nurse, thank you for not waking me; my beautiful dream would then have been broken. But Leonard—has he had his breakfast? Did he not wonder why I slept so long?"

Nurse Lee shook her head with a sad and puzzled look, with difficulty restraining her tears. It was evident that Nella had forgotten the grief of the preceding evening. To remind her of what had caused such bitter pangs seemed cruel, yet to leave her in this forgetfulness, or even to arouse her from it too suddenly might cause her a second shock.

"Your uncle and Captain Greville know that you had a head-ache last night, dear child," answered Nurse Lee gently and cautiously.

“A head-ache, nurse ; had I a head-ache ? I feel just now as if I had never known care or pain in my life. And what caused my head-ache ? You look away—your tears are falling, and you give me no answer. What can this mean ? Leonard !—you frighten me ; he is not ill—not dying ! Tell me, nurse, tell me truly ?” cried the now terrified girl, grasping her arm and looking wildly on her.

“No, no, darling, calm yourself. Your cousin is not dying—not ill—only—”

“Only what ?” questioned the panting girl, as the frightened nurse paused.

“You talked with him in the garden yesterday, sweet one ; you sat on the mount together,” answered the nurse very slowly and softly, caressing her darling the while.

“Talked to him in the garden—on the mount,” muttered poor Nella, as if memory came back very slowly ; then the whole seemed to flash upon her in an instant, striking her down as with the lightning’s stroke. “I know

it all now ; that was but a mocking dream," and sinking back on the pillow, she hid her face beneath the bed-clothes.

" My child ! my pet ! my darling ! my own Nella ! my sweet one ! look up ! speak to me !" cried poor nurse Lee terrified at the heaving up and down of the coverlid. But for a time her entreaties and caresses were alike unheeded. Nella heard them not--felt them not ; she was alone with her shame and agony.

" Sob not thus, my darling," cried the weeping nurse. " What would your uncle--what would your cousin think of this ? "

" I am not sobbing, nurse Lee : I have not shed a tear ; neither my uncle nor cousin shall ever see me shed one," said the resolute girl, throwing off the clothes from her face ; then starting up in the bed, she checked the convulsive heaving of her bosom by a determined will. " I could not if I would, for my eyeballs are like burning coals, and the tears would dry ere they flowed over them. Let me rise ; I

must be up and doing—I must go talk with Leonard, and offer my congratulations."

"Not yet awhile, love: there is no hurry; he does not expect to see you early—or well."

"Yes, but there is hurry, nurse Lee; he should, and he shall see me early; and see me well."

"But you are not equal to this, just yet, dear. Lie down again—sleep if you can, at least wait a little," said the weeping nurse, alarmed at the wild gleam in Nella's eye.

"No, no, nurse; no waiting; what should be done must be done at once, lest my strength should fail. There must be no delay—no time for thought. And sleep—I could not sleep again. There was no sleep for me last night; it was not till morning came that I closed my eyes when my worn out frame could bear no more, and a thrush's song lulled me off to rest. Ah! no more painful watching; no more deluding dreams, making the dreadful truth more dreadful still. Dress me quickly, and let

me hear all that must be said. Do not thwart me—do not chide me, dear nurse ; I could not bear it,; let me have my way now, and soon I hope to be patient—very patient.”

“ But, dear child, you are not equal to—”

“ I am equal—I will be equal to all that is needed,” said Nella quickly, interrupting her. “ You know not—I knew not myself of what I am capable. Do not chide me—do not look vexed, God knows that I say not this in pride, but in shame, trusting to him to give me strength.”

Nurse Lee was obliged to yield ; but she did it reluctantly. She dressed her charge quickly, and almost in silence, after making her understand by delicate hints that her cousin attributed her head-ache to running in the sun ; and that she was not expected to be well for some days, Nella understood her, but replied only by a grateful look. The careful nurse would have made her eat a good breakfast ; but gave up

the attempt on perceiving that the effort to swallow nearly choked her.

“God bless you, dear child, and support you!” said the affectionate woman, as Nella passed to the door; but for once Nella heard not those loving tones, and saw not the swimming eye. Her step was steady, almost stately, as she traversed the gallery, but Nurse Lee looked after her in fear and trembling, shaking her head as she thought of her darling’s pallid cheeks and gleaming eye.

## CHAPTER V.

“ I suppose you are better, since Lee lets you come down,” observed Mr. Hartnell, with rather more warmth than usual, encountering his niece on her way to the saloon. His nephew’s projected union, and the idea of possessing West Mead farm, which he had coveted for years, had not only put him in a better humour than usual, but had also made him more communicative, and he continued without waiting for Nella’s reply. What was her head-ache compared to the wedding of the heir of the Hartnells? “ I

suppose you have heard that Leonard is to marry Miss Evelyn."

"Yes, sir: he told me so yesterday."

"There is no use in delay, and I shall hasten matters as much as consorts with the station of the bridegroom. Of course, as my heir, my brothers not having left any son, Captain Greville's wedding cannot be exactly a common one. A Hartnell in blood, though unluckily not in name, must not be married like the son of an upstart: our family has always kept up a certain sort of pomp at such times. But the chances of war are uncertain. Should Captain Evelyn fall, his sister would be a great heiress, and her father might then look higher for his daughter, and break off the match."

"I thought Miss Evelyn was attached to my cousin," observed his niece in a calm and measured tone.

"Don't talk nonsense," replied her uncle sharply. "Girls must wed as their parents or guardians command them. And where is the

woman who does not sigh for a coronet? I know the sex well. But on second thoughts Leonard is a fine, handsome young man, and can talk the nonsense that women like so much. That is a good hint of yours," he added, looking more complacently at Nella. "Should the worst come, he may outwit the father by persuading the daughter to elope. All stratagems are fair in love and war."

His niece had given no hint, but she felt that her task would be hard enough without saying more than was needed, and therefore made no reply. She knew her own weakness, and this knowledge was, perhaps, her greatest strength.

Mr. Hartnell did not appear to remark her silence, but continued—.

"Leonard could not have made a better choice."

"I am glad you approve of it, sir," said Nella, finding that he waited for a reply.

"Of course; I could not do otherwise. The young lady will have a good fortune whether her

brother fall or not. Have you anything to say against it?"

"It is not for me, sir, to give an opinion, not even knowing Miss Evelyn, further than having seen her some years ago as a child."

"You are right there: you can have no voice in the matter," observed her uncle, looking into her face, for there was something about her which he could not understand. "Miss Evelyn is very lovely, and will maintain our family reputation for beauty," he added, partly to try her, and partly to please himself by stating another advantage of this much desired union.

"So I have heard, sir," answered his niece in the same calm, measured tone, the only sign of emotion, which his keen scrutiny could discover, being a sudden contraction of the brow; but that might be accounted for by the head-ache.

"I should have been sorry if Leonard had married a fright," remarked Mr. Hartnell.

"It would have been a pity," answered his niece.

“ Being the only lady in our family, you must call on Miss Evelyn.”

Nella, taken by surprise at this proposition, was unable to suppress a start, but recovering herself on the instant, replied in her former measured tone, never suspecting that her resolute self-command, by giving a tone of decision to her manner, had caused her uncle to regard her, involuntarily, with more respect. Yesterday he had looked upon her as a girl—to-day he felt that she was a woman; but how the change had been wrought he could not tell.

“ I am ready to do whatever you wish, uncle; but never having mixed in society, a first visit to strangers must be awkward and embarrassing.”

“ Of course to you,” replied her uncle, with an emphasis on the *you*, which his niece could not mistake. “ But still, as a matter of etiquette it must be done. You need not call more than once or twice; and after the wedding

you can be as secluded as ever. You may call to-day, or to-morrow as you like."

"To-morrow then, if you please; my head may be freer from pain."

"To-morrow then let it be: I shall order the carriage accordingly."

"That girl does not like the marriage; she hoped to be mistress here for some years at least—perhaps for ever should anything happen to Leonard. There is an air of decision too about her which I never remarked before, and do not entirely approve. Obedience is what I expect from her, and that I have a right to require, since, thanks to her father's folly (misfortunes his wife used to say) she has not above a few hundreds of her own; and even those I might claim for lodging and education. And yet that was not a bad suggestion of hers about the elopement," thought Mr. Hartnell as he went on his way, leaving Nella to go on hers. "It is very odd that neither of my sisters ever

thought of keeping up the family splendour, and thus all devolves upon me."

"I have been telling Nella that I shall hasten the wedding as much as is consistent with the dignity of such an ancient family as ours," said Mr. Hartnell, meeting his nephew soon after.

"Thank you, my dear uncle, a thousand, thousand thanks," said the ardent lover, with a warmer glow of gratitude than he had ever before experienced for his cold, prudent relation. "Is dear Nella down then? I want to talk to her of Frances, my marriage, and a hundred things beside."

"I doubt if Nella will thank you for talking to her about Miss Evelyn and your marriage; she does not approve of the match," replied Mr. Hartnell drily.

"Not approve of the match, my dear uncle! What can you mean? What can she say against Frances? or what right can she have to interfere?" exclaimed the impetuous Leonard.

“Never having seen Miss Evelyn, she can have nothing to say against her, and Nella will not presume to interfere in family arrangements; but still I repeat she does not approve of the match. She expected to be mistress at the Hall.”

“Did she tell you this, Sir?” enquired Leonard in surprise.

“She is not an idiot to say this in words, but I read it in her looks: she had not art enough to conceal her vexation.”

“You must be mistaken, my dear uncle. I never saw in Nella a wish to rule; and she must have known that I should marry some time or other,” replied Leonard warmly.

“I am not often mistaken in my judgment: I know the world as it is,” remarked Mr. Hartnell, with a withering smile of self complacency. “Soldiers are not immortal—not bullet proof. Were your marriage deferred, she might be the only one left of our race to inherit the property.”

“ Impossible, Sir!” exclaimed the shocked and indignant Leonard. “ Nella loves me too well for this: and her heart cannot harbour one base, or unworthy thought.”

“ You speak like a hot-headed youth: it will prove as I say. The girl has more forethought than I gave her credit for, and is not as good a dissembler as she should be to conceal her hopes. Did she not encourage your military ardour even whilst professing to grieve for your absence?”

“ Not from a mercenary motive, of that she is incapable; but merely because she saw that my mind was set upon it.”

“ Don’t be a fool, Leonard: Nella is not one: she can look forward and plan. You know nothing of the world—I know it well. None but such hot-brained youths as yourself act without motives; and you will grow wiser in time if not taught quicker by bitter experience.”

“ I would stake my life on Nella’s affection and disinterestedness.”

“ And lose it,” replied his uncle with a sneer, “ and no one to blame for the loss but yourself. Affection!—there speaks the vanity of a coxcomb—disinterestedness!—there speaks the folly of an ideot. Open your eyes and ears, and admit that I am right—go talk to her if you will ; I have no more time to waste in teaching a blind kitten to see.”

“ She is lovely, and will maintain the fame of the family for beauty,” thought Nella Wilmer, as she proceeded to the saloon, after quitting her uncle. “ And I am—but it matters not what I am, I must be calm. Being the only lady of the family, I must call on Miss Evelyn; and after the wedding I may live as secluded as I please. Like an extra trapping, or a pair of candlesticks, I must be exhibited on this occasion to increase the family splendour, and please the family pride: that satisfied,

I may be laid up in the garret till needed again. How my uncle's worldly spirit withers and blights every opening bud of affection. I have never dared call him dear uncle to his face ; and he has never felt the omission : he holds sir respectful ; and he only requires respect. “ Ah, well ! it is a safer feeling than—but I must think on other things,” and laying her hand resolutely on the lock of the door, she entered the saloon.

Her eye glanced hastily round the apartment—it was empty ; and she felt relieved. To think that the time had come when she felt relieved by the absence of Leonard ! She walked towards the embroidery frame, looked at it for an instant, then turned away with a 'shudder, that was too great a trial for to-day—she dared not tax her heart beyond its strength. She approached a window, for she felt faint, and needed air. There in the garden, close by that clustering rose, she had stood with Leonard on the preceding day, so full of life, and hope, and

joy. She turned away with a stronger shudder, and arranging the curtains so as to darken that part of the room, took her seat on a sofa at the extremity of the large saloon.

By a powerful effort she endeavoured to fix her attention on the open book which she held before her. Her eyes followed the lines, but her ears were intent on a coming step; and her mind wandered far from the contents of the volume. She heard Leonard's tread in the passage, not light and joyous as of old, but slow and thoughtful—her whole frame shook; but she stayed the emotion, and sat, in all outward seeming, calm, cold, and still; how cold she did not guess, every thought being occupied in concealing all appearance of agitation. Her only fear was the showing too much warmth.

In spite of his indignant defence of Nella, and his repeated disbelief of his uncle's words, those words had left some impression, and Leonard, in spite of himself, dwelt on his cousin's disapproval of his match, on his way to the

saloon. It was this which had rendered his tread more slow and thoughtful, and it was this that gave him an air of gravity, amounting almost to coldness and rebuke, as he entered the room and approached his playfellow, who, as we have already said, was seated at its further extremity, which position afforded her full opportunity of marking his looks and manner. Had he advanced with his usual lively step and eager warmth, her answering greeting would have been warmer. Many a friendship, many an affection has been broken by fancied coldness on either side.

“Good morning, Nella. You are sitting in the dark in that distant corner. Shall I put back the curtain?”

“No I thank you, Leonard; you forget my head ache.”

“Ay, so I did, unkind that I am; but I was in hopes it had left you from my seeing you here.”

“My head-aches, as you know, seldom leave

me in a day, and nurse would have kept me up stairs if she could ; but I heard that you wished to talk to me, so insisted on coming down, though I am sadly afraid I shall make but a stupid listener to-day, for my head is very painful still."

" My poor Nella ! And nurse lays it all upon me, and that unlucky run. I was too happy to think of anything but my own delight ?

" My exertions yesterday were rather too much for me ; but I shall be myself again soon."

" I hope you will, dear Nella ; for I want you to be very well, and very happy ; and to love dear Frances very much."

" I will see what can be done ; but first let me congratulate you and wish you all happiness."

" Thank you, Nella. If you will only make haste and get well, I will answer for your loving dear Frances ; she is so lovely—so exceedingly lovely."

“ So I have heard ; and lovely people must be loved.”

There was a something in the tone of this reply which Leonard neither understood nor liked ; and yet, if questioned, he could not have told why he was thus displeased. Was it only the aching head which made her so different from usual ?—which caused her manner to seem so cold ?—her tone so measured ? Did she doubt his assertion of Miss Evelyn’s beauty, or had some fancy raised a prejudice against her ?

“ All agree that Miss Evelyn is lovely,” he repeated, a little piqued.

“ I never doubted it, Leonard.”

“ And she is good as fair—formed to be loved by the whole world,” continued the impetuous lover.

“ For your sake I trust she is all, and, if it can be, more than this.”

“ She is, Nella ; she is. Come with me and judge for yourself. I have told her of you—I

have engaged that you shall love her as a sister."

"I will try my best so to do, but I am not equal to going with you to-day. To-morrow I am to call with my uncle."

"I am sorry you cannot go with me to-day," said Leonard with a disappointed air. "I had so set my heart on taking you with me to the Grange."

"One day's delay cannot much matter," answered Nella.

All further conversation was checked by the entrance of nurse Lee, who came, avowedly to coax her darling to take a jelly, as she had eaten no breakfast, but really to ascertain how she bore the exertion of conversing with Leonard.

"This talking has done you no good, Miss Nella; if I had my way you should go back to your room for the rest of the day," added the anxious nurse, alarmed at the looks of her much loved charge.

"I suppose I must obey you for the sake of

peace," replied the suffering girl, understanding her wish to spare her further trial for that day at least.

She tried to force a smile as she spoke, but the attempt was a failure, and nurse Lee's support alone prevented her from falling.

"Take my arm, Nella," said Leonard rising too.

"No, I thank you; dear nurse's is quite sufficient. Tell Miss Evelyn that I hope to call on her to-morrow."

"I will deliver your message," observed Leonard coldly, stepping back to permit his cousin to pass.

From the shade of the curtain, and that cousin's position, he had not once seen her face; had he done so, notwithstanding the perfect steadiness of her voice, he must have guessed some portion of her suffering, and might have drawn a different conclusion to what he did.

"My uncle was right: Nella does not approve of the match," was his thought as he

watched her across the room. “ She who used to be so warm and frank-hearted, so ready to share all my hopes and fears, is now cold, formal, and indifferent. She may not speculate on the chance of becoming the heir were my marriage delayed—I will not believe she does: but she is not pleased at the thought of my wedding, and perhaps has looked forward to being, for a time at least, the mistress of the Hall. I shall be able to judge better after the interview. Surely the beauty and sweetness of Frances must overcome all prejudice, and win her affection.”

“ The bond is broken between us; we shall never again be to each other what we once were,” thought the suffering Nella, as she proceeded slowly to her room. “ He was only grieved at my head-ache, as it prevented my seeing his lovely bride. Ah, lovely! that it is which has won him—that it is which has made him forget the fond affection of our childish years. Once I was all to him—now I am

nothing: nothing to him—nothing to any. My sun has set, darkness and gloom are gathering round, and the night of the tomb will soon be here."

Nella appeared no more that evening, and took her breakfast the next morning in her own apartment, as nurse asserted by her express command; but she was ready at the appointed hour to accompany her uncle to the Grange, to all appearance calm and composed as on the preceding day; but Mr. Hartnell considered looking somewhat better.

Leonard had set his heart on introducing his cousin to his beautiful mistress, but business called him away in a contrary direction; and he had not even an opportunity of seeing his cousin before his departure.

The lumbering coach rolled slowly on towards the Grange, but there was little conversation between the occupants. Mr. Hartnell, having enquired after Nella's head-ache, and added a hint that he expected her to be particularly

cordial towards Miss Evelyn, considering that he had fulfilled all the duties of politeness and prudence, said no more, but beguiled the time by counting up the number of acres which might hereafter belong to the Hartnells, should the properties of the Hall and the Grange become united.

As Nella never needlessly addressed her uncle, her silence was not remarkable; and as to her thoughts, as she strove both to control and conceal them, we will not lay them open against her will.

It was the first drive that she had ever taken —the first visit that she had ever paid with her uncle; and thus a sensation of something strange and novel was mingled with her other feelings. The meeting any strangers would have been embarrassing to one of her secluded habits; but how much was this embarrassment increased by the relative positions of those to whom she was to be introduced. She, the plain, neglected cousin was to meet the loved

and lovely mistress; and was enjoined to be cordial to her, who was robbing her life of the only joy which it had ever known. Timid from her want of intercourse with society—constrained from the consciousness of a secret which she would rather suffer death than reveal, yet which she dreaded an inadvertent look might betray; and still more embarrassed by her uncle's hint, it was little likely that Nella Wilmer should please the Evelyns, however the Evelyns might please her. Under ordinary circumstances, and with an ordinary character, the timidity arising from seclusion would have exhibited itself in the shape of awkward confusion; but from the resolute will, and the necessity and power of self-control possessed by Nella, it rather took the form of a cold, and almost commanding self-possession, more calculated to win respect than love. Mr. Hartnell beheld this cold self-possession with surprise, and reading in it ill-humour, was confirmed by its appearance in his former suspicions.

Mr. Evelyn was a highly nervous man in delicate health. His features were good, and their expression would have been pleasing had they not borne a character of timidity, almost amounting to terror, which was painful to the observer. Shy and undecided, his bashfulness was annoying not only to himself but others, since it gave to his whole air and manner a fidgetty restlessness and ill assured motion, which was distressing to all who knew him, conveying an idea of a deficiency in honest straightforwardness of purpose, an idea confirmed by his rarely looking any one in the face. He was much attached to his children, kind and liberal to his friends and dependants. No one had ever brought against him the charge of broken faith. There was not a man in the county who would not have trusted him for thousands; and not one who would have said that he doubted his word; and yet all felt, if they did not say it, that he was not a person whom they would have characterised as sincere, though

his professions of service had always been fulfilled. There was no act to stamp him as insecure or untrue ; but he wanted that frankness which wins trust and reliance. It was one of those unhappy cases in which the character was belied by the manner. A frank and daring spirit, even though sullied by open crime, would have been more popular, and inspired more confidence than Mr. Evelyn with his amiable disposition, and countless friendly acts.

Even those who loved him best were perfectly aware of this, and regretted the timid will, and shuffling manner which they attributed solely to his nervous state, and his struggles with abject poverty in his youth, when thrown off by his avaricious father for marrying a then penniless orphan against his consent. The death of his elder brother replaced him in his rightful position as heir ; but the evil done could not be recalled. The easy, confident manner of his youth was gone for ever ; and he returned to the home of his childhood with a

crushed and timid spirit. "Crouching, and looking down like a frightened hound dreading the lash," as Mr. Hartnell once said in vexation, annoyed at not having been able to bring him to a decision on a point which he had much at heart; adding with a bitter sneer, "he always seems to me in fear of the gallows for some unknown crime."

During the life time of Mrs. Evelyn this timid nervousness had been less marked and less painful; but she had been dead some years, and after her death this feeling had evidently increased till within the last year or two, since which period his friends had found him more easy and cheerful.

His maiden sister, Mrs. Margaret Evelyn, who resided with him, was a softened resemblance of her brother in features, with a sweet and placid look and manner, soothing to all within its influence, though her deafness prevented her enjoying, or even entering into society as she would otherwise have done.

Older in years than her brother, she was younger in mind, and had the power of winning hearts by a single glance or word.

Had Mr. Evelyn said that black was black, his embarrassed manner might have induced some to doubt the fact; whilst, had his sister asserted that black was white, her frank and truthful, though very gentle manner, might have made many doubtful whether such were not really the case; at last, all would have been convinced that she herself believed what she maintained. They were a practical illustration of the old proverb—the sister might have stolen a horse with impunity—the brother would have been hanged for only looking over the hedge. So much for manner. And yet, there were those who asserted that the manners of the brother and sister had in their youth borne a striking resemblance.

Miss Evelyn was all, and more than all that her lover had said; and Nella absolutely started on first beholding her exceeding loveliness. For

a moment her brow was contracted as by a sudden pain, then the contraction passed away, and a deeper sadness came over her pallid features.

The greeting of Frances was graceful, but rather timid—the manner of Nella colder than she intended, or indeed was aware of. Whilst seeking to conceal some strong emotion, some passionate feeling, it is very difficult to avoid running into the opposite extreme.

The father and uncle conversed on the future plans and prospects of their daughter and nephew, whilst the two young people sat a little apart, and Mrs. Margaret looked complacently from one to the other.

“ Nella is no fool: she knows how to adapt herself to circumstances,” thought Mr. Hartnell, as he marked his niece that was, talking away to his niece that was to be. “ She is holding the glass to the beauty who, as the wife of the future heir, may do her some service hereafter; and should this beauty be as vacillating and

timid as her father, Nella may have the power of a mistress, though not the name or dignity. The girl has an air of command befitting a queen; and I begin to suspect a wit and cunning befitting a prime minister. This will be Leonard's look out, not mine. If the giant will let the dwarf rule, so let it be: she has more wisdom than he has now."

Mr. Hartnell followed the old, and in most instances very just, saying, of judging others by himself. He piqued himself on knowing the world—he did not know his niece—hers was a character which it was utterly impossible such a mind as his could comprehend. There was no one point of sympathy between them—no spot for mutual standing ground.

Nella was talking to her young companion, as her uncle had observed;—talking calmly and politely; but she was holding no glass to the beauty, making no way with the future mistress of the Hall, whose kind offices might hereafter stand her in good stead. She thought nothing of the

future—all her care was for the present:—so to look, and so to act as to give none a suspicion of the truth; and in this she most perfectly succeeded, but in nothing more. She inspired no feeling of affection in her cousin elect, and this she was far too keen sighted not to observe, though perfectly unconscious that her own manner had chilled the gentle, sensitive Frances.

Leonard, resolved that his cousin and bride should be sworn friends, had lauded the charms of the latter to the former, and the warm heart of the former to the latter. He had said no more than the truth in either case; but in his utter blindness as to Nella's feelings he had done exactly that which was most likely to thwart his plans. He thought his cousin incapable of the base feeling of envy, and so she was; but to hear the beauty of her rival thrust forward, as it were, on every occasion, seemed little short of insult to her, who deemed her deficiencies in the mere matter of beauty far greater than they were. She would not have

lessened Miss Evelyn's loveliness, even if a mere wish could have done it; but it made her sad when she found how much was said of it—how much was thought of it. Had she been beautiful then Leonard's love might have been hers.

Frances, on the other hand, had heard so much of Nella's firmness, and warmth, and energy, that once she almost doubted whether her lover's praise of these qualities might not be intended as a hint to her, she being rather loving and gentle than firm or energetic; but had Miss Wilmer met her with the boasted warmth, this doubtful feeling would soon have been exchanged for one of regard. Leonard had forgotten that Nella's energy and warmth, though fully apparent when alone with him, were never observable in the presence of his uncle; and Frances, ignorant of this, was chilled by Nella's manner, from the first moment of her entrance. A sudden drawing back was

remarked by Nella, and attributed to a sudden disgust at her appearance.

With such misapprehensions on either side, though the young ladies might talk and smile there was little chance of their becoming friends; both felt this, and both rejoiced when Mr. Hartnell rose to take leave. As they were standing together, poor Nella's eye accidentally fell on a large pier glass, which reflected the figure of both. The contrast struck as a dagger to her heart: she continued to gaze for some moments, then turned abruptly away, whilst her pale cheek grew paler still. She did not venture to raise her eyes to Frances; but she caught the sympathising look of Mrs. Margaret Evelyn, and her heart clung to her from that moment.

To Mr. Evelyn's polite hope that she would see much of his daughter, and to that daughter's graceful courtesy, her only reply was a formal reverence, and a slight inclination

of the head ; but Mrs. Margaret's hope that she should soon see her again, and her friendly pressure of the hand, made the curling lip quiver with emotion ; and it was with difficulty that she could reply with tolerable composure, that she rarely quitted the Hall.

“ I shall love that woman to my dying day,” thought Nella Wilmer as she left the room. “ Her pitying look fell like oil on my tortured spirit. She read my feelings when we stood together, at least some of my feelings. It is said she loved hopelessly in her youth, and that he whom she loved broke his vows to her, and wedded another. Though he was false—she loved not again. Yet she is lovely in her age, and must have been more so in her youth. Cannot even beauty ensure affection ?”

The question was not without use to her troubled spirit.

“ What do you think of Leonard's choice ?” enquired Mr. Hartnell as they were returning to the Hall.

“ She is more beautiful than I had imagined,” answered his niece.

“ No very great strength of mind I should think—has she?” said her uncle searchingly.

“ Of that it would be impossible to form a judgment on so short an acquaintance,” replied Miss Wilmer, in exactly the same unvarying tone in which she was in the habit of conversing with Mr. Hartnell.

“ She is prudent and tells nothing,” thought the man who knew the world. “ Were she but a boy, and as well grown as Leonard she should be my heir in preference.”

“ And what think you of Mr. Evelyn?” he continued aloud.

“ That he is quite as nervous as his friends represent him.”

“ Nervous!” repeated Mr. Hartnell impatiently. “ I hate the word; it is used as a cover for every species of folly from the silly fears of a fine lady, or the whims of a hypochondriac, up to the vacillating indecision of an

ideot. As I told Leonard the other day, he has the appearance of a man who fears to see a ghost, or a hangman at his elbow ; and there is no getting him to decide on any thing ; though he has been better of late, particularly in this matter of the wedding."

" Perhaps he is anxious for the marriage," observed his niece.

" He were more of a fool than even I think him to be, if he were not. Such a property as the Hall is not to be found every day ; and with such a fine handsome young man as its heir too, though that last is more the young lady's concern. But he has been gradually getting more upright and less embarrassed for some months. I should not wonder if he grew bold enough to look in your face, and say—no, at last. I think I first observed the change soon after the death of Sir Francis Paulet."

" Could there be any connection between the two circumstances ?" enquired Nella.

" What connection could there possibly be ?

Don't ask silly questions," replied her uncle rather sharply, then added in a more thoughtful tone—" Yet I don't know either. Some persons maintained that Mr. Evelyn lent large sums to the baronet, and if so his death might be rather a relief; but as no claims were brought forward after the demise of Sir Francis, this could hardly be. Even Mr. Evelyn would not lend money without receiving an equivalent (none but a downright ideot would)—and all the county knew that the baronet had not a shilling at his own disposal, the estates being all strictly entailed, and the rents forestalled. How did you like Mrs. Margaret Evelyn?"

" She wins the heart at once."

" Young people are always talking of their hearts, and yours must be carelessly kept to be gone so soon," observed Mr. Hartnell, with his accustomed sneer at any thing which seemed a matter of feeling, surprised at the unwonted warmth displayed by his niece in her brief reply, and looking at her searchingly as he spoke.

“Hearts are very troublesome commodities, and instead of being boasted of should be got rid of as soon as possible; they are always rash and foolish counsellors, as Mrs. Margaret found to her cost. Now she is more of a man, in mind I mean, than her brother: she has more decision and energy, and it is a pity that her deafness prevents her enjoying society, and makes it such an exertion to talk to her, but in her youth she was hot-headed and obstinate. Fell in love, as it is called, with a poor man, and refused to marry a rich one at her father’s command. And what was the reward of such folly? Her poor lover married an heiress, and she was left in the lurch.”

“But she never changed—she never loved another,” observed his niece in an earnest tone, which annoyed the man who knew the world.

“No; and there she is an old maid for her pains. She might have been mistress of the Hall had she chosen, for she was very beautiful

then. A boy I should have liked—a direct heir; but I count myself fortunate having no girls; women are always playing the fool. Your mother married a poor man, and what was the consequence? Leonard's mother did the same; and he has a paltry two thousand pounds, and you about as many hundreds all due to me for board and education, if I chose to claim it. Girls are of no use in a family, unless they make splendid matches, only running away with the property that should go to support the state of the eldest son. Lucky for Leonard that I have no children of my own. Don't you follow your mother's example and marry a poor man, or I throw you off entirely."

"I shall never marry," answered Nella, in a low, deep voice.

"No: of course not; and better that it should be so, since there is no chance of your making a high match: the little I may give you can go at your death to Leonard, or his children. The

only wise thing my sisters did was not leaving a tribe of descendants to rob the heir of his just rights."

Nella sank back in the carriage without reply, and Mr. Hartnell betook himself to marking the value of the timber belonging to the Grange.

## CHAPTER VI.

“Is she not lovely?” questioned the ardent lover, nearly overturning the formal looking butler, and his uncle to boot, in his eagerness to learn Nella’s opinion of his mistress.

“Miss Evelyn is surpassingly lovely,” replied his cousin promptly, but not, as he considered very warmly.

“And you love her already,” continued the impatient Leonard.

“It is enough that you should do that: I must not usurp your privileges,” said Nella.

forcing a smile—a sickly thing that did not deserve the name.

“ Oh ! I will let others love her, provided she love but me.”

“ That is an unfair bargain, and I will have nothing to do with it,” answered Nella with another attempt at playfulness, turning away so that he did not see her face.

“ I will be more than fair, dear Nella, I will be absolutely generous. You shall win her to love you more than me—if you can. When are you to meet again ?”

“ No time was fixed. I have lived too long secluded for my society to give pleasure to any.”

“ Say not so, dear Nella ; and do not go to your own room. I have half an hour to spare before I can well set off for the Grange, and I want to talk with you about Miss Evelyn.”

Not now—some other time—my head still aches.”

“ Your head always aches now,” observed the young man pettishly. “ There was a time when, however ill, you were ready to listen to me.”

“ There is some one else who will listen to you now, and I have only pleaded a head-ache these two days.”

“ I meant nothing unkind,” said Leonard, struck with the deep sadness of her tones.

“ I doubt if you know what you mean, young men seldom do ; lovers especially,” said Mr. Hartnell. “ Tell me how you sped in your business, and let the poor girl go to her room. Can’t you see that she is looking like a corpse ; and very unfit to listen to all your nonsense. She will be having one of her old dangerous illnesses again, and that may retard the marriage. Ah ! there is Lee hurrying to look after her charge ; she is in good hands, now, so come with me.”

Leonard followed his uncle, though reluctantly, for his cousin’s deathly look was alarm-

ing ; but Mr. Hartnell was not to be disobeyed, and Nella was left with Nurse Lee, who supported her to her room.

“ What ails my cousin ? ” enquired Leonard of his uncle, instead of telling how he had sped on his business.”

“ She has the megrims, I suppose, or is out of humour ; they are both fashionable complaints at present among ladies of high quality ; ay, and of low quality too, for the little must ape the great. She was talking away fast enough to Miss Evelyn but now. Did you see Sampson ? ”

To ask further questions would have been useless, so Leonard answered his uncle’s queries, and then set off for the Grange, where he was engaged to dine, Nella’s declining to listen to him, and Mr. Hartnell’s remarks having left an impression on his mind unfavorable to his cousin.

“ Nella has been here to-day ; did you not find her clever and warm-hearted as I told

you?" asked Leonard of his lady-love, as they were strolling in the shrubbery after dinner.

"Yes, very clever," answered Frances looking away.

"And warm-hearted? did you not also find her that?"

"Her stay was short: when we know more of each other I doubt not finding her all that you have said."

"Then you did not find her this to-day," said Leonard in vexation. "I had hoped that each would find a sister in the other."

"Perhaps we may after a longer acquaintance. I will try to love your cousin, Leonard, indeed I will, since you wish it."

The try to love had a jarring sound in Leonard's ears, but the blame was not laid on his beautiful mistress. How could it be when he gazed on her surpassing loveliness, and heard her engage to do all things that he should wish? No, the blame must rest with Nella; she could have made no effort to please, or she and Miss

Evelyn would have been friends at once.

“ Yet Nella talked a good deal,” he observed.

“ At least so my uncle thought.”

“ Oh! yes she talked—but—”

“ But what, sweet love? I must know all.”

“ I do not know myself,” answered Frances with bewitching *naïveté*. “ Only she seemed to talk as one who felt that she must talk—to talk as a duty, not as a pleasure; and I was awed and chilled.”

“ Awed and chilled at Nella, then she must have been very different to what she usually is. Perhaps she was in pain, for she is still suffering from a head-ache, and perhaps too she felt awkward at seeing strangers for the first time in her life.”

“ Yes, I dare say that was it,” said Frances readily, anxious to please her lover, who she saw was much disappointed. “ Miss Wilmer did look very pale, and Aunt Margaret thought was suffering much. She has won my aunt’s heart already.”

“ And she must win yours too, Frances, when free from pain ; poor Nella has sad headaches at times. I must bring her over some day without my uncle, for she rarely says much in his presence, now I remember.”

“ But your cousin may not desire this, for when my aunt expressed a hope that we should often meet, Miss Wilmer answered coldly, I thought, that she but rarely quitted the Hall.”

“ Ay, that is it : my uncle has kept her so secluded that she shrinks from meeting strangers ; we must cure her of this dread.”

But though Leonard thus made excuses for his cousin to Miss Evelyn, he did not wholly acquit her in his own heart. She should love all whom he loved—she had so done in former days, she must do so now, or, like his uncle, he should consider her actuated by petty jealousy, or it might be some still baser feeling. The seeds of distrust were sown in his heart, circumstances might destroy or nourish them—they might never germinate, or they might

grow up into a mental Upas tree, distilling poison upon all around.

“ The half hour of weary waiting which he would have spent upon me in talking of Miss Evelyn is past; and he is on his way to talk to her,” thought the suffering Nella as from her window she watched Leonard gallop off towards the Grange. “ He thinks only of me as a patient listener to all his praises of her whom he loves, when he cannot look or speak those praises to herself. I am no longer the first in his estimation—no longer the sharer of his hopes—the keeper of his secrets: that is gone for ever. And can she be to him what I once was? She is gentle and affectionate they say, and lovely—oh! very lovely. As we stood together before the glass I could not wonder at his choice; but he should have told me of this before—he should have trusted me more. But I am only his poor, lonely cousin—poor Nella Wilmer, whom no one desired to live—who should have died long ago. What right have I

to be ill ? to have head-aches, and decline listening to all his rapture ? I am but a poor, wretched, penniless orphan, whose maintenance may rob him of some small portion of that which should keep up the family splendour. I should not have expected his confidence."

" How old was my poor mother, nurse, when she died ?" enquired Nella abruptly, raising her head from the sill of the window on which it had been resting.

" Only four and thirty, darling, for she was younger than your uncle."

" And I am but nineteen. Fifteen weary years—it may be more; and then the little that has gone to support me will go to Leonard or his children, as my uncle said. He may have many by that time—he may desire my death before," observed Nella sadly ; then added with a burst of passionate feeling.—" Why did you strive so hard to rear me, nurse ? I cannot bless you for this— I should have died as a child."

The weeping nurse made no answer in words ; but she passed her arms round the neck of her darling, and showered upon her kisses and caresses as she had been wont to do in her childhood.

Nella was subdued ; her bitter and passionate mood passed away—the tears that seemed to have been frost bound were unloosed by these tender endearments ; and she wept on the shoulder of her faithful nurse. These tears cooled the burning of her brain, relieved the weight at her heart, and banished the fear of delirium which the intensity of the pain in her temples had threatened.

“ There is the dinner bell, dear nurse. I cannot go down—I must be quiet—alone—to-day.”

“ I thought of that, and sent word to your uncle that I could not permit you to leave your room ; he does not expect you, nay, said I was right to keep you quiet.”

“ Ah ! dear, kind nurse, what do I not owe

you? You think of all things—you pity and soothe when I deserve to be chidden. I am weak—very weak; but to-morrow I shall be better—stronger. Ah! to-morrow—I would put every thing off till to-morrow; but after to-day there shall be no to-morrow—no putting off—no loading the future with the weight of the present."

" You must not tax yourself too hardly, darling."

" I must be equal to the taxing laid upon me, nurse. Have you ever seen Mrs. Margaret Evelyn?"

" Often in former days, love. Why do you ask?"

" Did you ever remark her sweet and placid smile? One would think her life had been but a sunny summer day, and that her foot had only trod on flowers. And yet she has suffered much—seen the one whom she loved united to another, breaking his vows to her. She has borne all this and lived—not loved another—

mind you that. Kept firm her maiden faith—kept warm her heart wrought to a gentle spirit by her wrongs, not stung to bitterness. It is a beautiful and blessed thing to look upon her—it is the triumph of heavenly hope over earthly woe. I would be like her, nurse; pray you that this may be. And now let me lie down, and I will try to sleep. The body's weariness weighs down the soaring spirit; and I must not be ill—it might defer the wedding."

When nurse entered her darling's room in the morning, she found her already risen.

"Don't shake your head, and look grave, dear nurse; I said there should be no more to-morrows: to-day is to-day, and must bear its burden. Think not I act in my own strength alone, did I trust only to that I were weak indeed."

Nurse Lee did shake her head, and look very grave notwithstanding this order; but she offered no remonstrance, for she saw that her

charge was resolute ; and, Nella was speedily dressed.

“ I am glad to see you in your old place again ; breakfast seems scarcely like breakfast when you are away,” said Leonard, greeting his cousin warmly.

“ Nor tea like tea when made by a lover,” observed his uncle. “ But have you nurse Lee’s permission for this ? She talked yesterday of your keeping your room some time, and save that you seem to have rather more life, you look nearly as ill as before.”

“ Had nurse Lee forbade my leaving my room, I had not ventured to disobey, sir.”

“ Why no, I suppose not, for nurse Lee is somewhat resolute, and not a little obstinate ; but if there is an honest woman in the world it is she.”

“ Do you doubt the existence of an honest woman ?” enquired the lover quickly.

“ I don’t mean that they are worse than the

men for that, only more useless. Don't put yourself in a rage for nothing, you will think as I do after the honeymoon; but you do right to marry, being the next heir, and have made a prudent choice. The bride will not come without a dower."

The hot-headed lover was somewhat chafed at the term prudent choice, and was on the point of declaring that Frances Evelyn would have been equally dear to him without a dower as with one; but on second and wiser thoughts he held his tongue. To vex his uncle might not only injure his prospects, but would be ungrateful; whilst to make him less worldly was an attempt beyond even his rampant quixotism. So he held his peace, and but little more was said during the meal.

"I have not a minute to spare, Nella, for I am to take an early ride with Frances and her father," said Leonard, following his cousin into the saloon.

"But now that you are well again, suppose

you call at the Grange after dinner: I want you to see more of Frances. You are a capital walker; and it is not far across the two parks."

" My uncle did not seem to think me as well as you do; and I must wait till Miss Evelyn has returned my visit," answered Nella, coldly, as Leonard thought, not aware how great was the effort required to reply with composure to such an unexpected and startling proposition.

" If you choose to stand upon ceremony, Nella, I don't see how you and Frances are ever to become like sisters."

" Let us become cousins first, dear Leonard; and then the other I trust will follow," said Nella gently. " My uncle might not approve of this second visit, as being beneath the dignity of the Hartnells."

" What can you mean by saying, let us first become cousins? Do you know of any thing likely to render this event a matter of doubt, or do you only speak as you wish?" exclaimed Leonard anxiously.

“ I know nothing likely to prevent your union ; and only wish your happiness.”

“ You did so once, Nella ; but I doubt it now.”

“ You do me wrong by the doubt.”

“ I hope I do,” said Leonard, struck by the tone of the speaker , which both surprised and puzzled him. “ But I have not a moment’s time to talk with you now, lest I should keep Frances, my own beautiful Frances, waiting. Even you admit her to be lovely—do you not?”

“ Most surpassingly lovely ; never in my dreams, waking or sleeping have I imagined such beauty.”

“ Ah ! There speaks my good cousin Nella again. I sup at the Grange, but Mr. Evelyn retires early, and so does my uncle ; wait for me in your little study, and we will have a long cose to-night touching my love. It will not be our first talk at night by many a one, unknown to our uncle. The lips may speak, but the

heart dare not in his presence. So fare you well till then, sweet coz; and I will bear this salute from you to my fair mistress, and vow that you bade me deliver it," raising her hand to his lips as he spoke with a mixture of cousinly freedom, and the respectful gallantry of those olden times.

Leonard quitted the room without waiting for a reply, and ere ten minutes more had elapsed was far on his way to the Grange."

Had he chanced to return, and seen Nella standing where he had left her, with one hand pressed against her side to stay the wild beating of her heart, and her eyes fixed intently on the other, that hand which he had raised to his lips, it is possible that some idea of the truth might have flashed across him, and his conscience rebuked him for maintaining silence on this important point, whilst professing to lay open his whole heart to his cousin.

"Where is Nella, nurse Lee? I am come

to have a long talk with her," said Leonard Greville, entering his cousin's little study on his return from the Grange.

" You are going to do no such thing, Captain Greville," answered nurse gravely.

" Indeed ! And who shall prevent me ?"

" That will I. Miss Nella has been in bed this hour ; she was too ill to sit up late as you might have seen this morning, if you could think of anybody but yourself and Miss Evelyn."

" She made no objection at the time, and therefore should have kept her engagement," answered Leonard, nettled at her charge, of which he felt the truth.

" And so she would have done, had I not threatened to go to her uncle if she attempted it. She sent you this note instead. You should not have asked her to meet you at this hour."

" You take on yourself, nurse Lee. I am no longer a boy to be schooled and scolded thus."

“ No, Captain Greville ; if you were, there would be more excuse for your selfish thoughtlessness. To your aunt do I owe all that I have, and all that I am ; and to her child will I devote myself even unto death. Look you to it, young man. You are in the height of prosperity now ; and all goes as you wish—take heed that this happiness make you not selfish and presumptuous, lest your head grow giddy from this excess of joy, and you fall : take heed lest this cup be not dashed from your lip ere you taste it.”

“ What mean you by this, nurse ?” cried the startled Leonard.

“ A warning : do you take it as such. The Lord will not uphold those who give no thought to the sufferings of others.”

“ These are not words which befit you,” said Leonard hotly. “ I have often thus talked with Nella before, and with your sanction, and in your presence too.”

“ That may well be ; you were but boy and

girl three years ago, and Miss Wilmer was in good health; now she is ill, very ill, as you would perceive, were your thoughts less selfishly employed."

"Is Nella really so ill? Have you not sent for advice?" asked Leonard anxiously, forgetting all his ill humour.

"A few days' quiet will do her more good than all the doctors in England."

"She has, been free from head-ache for years."

"You are mistaken: she has suffered much from head-ache within the last twelvemonths."

"I am sorry for that—very sorry; but you must cure her, nurse, and cure her soon too; she must look well and happy at my wedding. And now good night, lest you should give me a second scolding. You are not in good humour, Nurse Lee—mind you sleep well; and tell Nella that I hope to see her better in the morning."

"Ay, that your wedding may not be put off," said the faithful nurse, with unusual bitterness,

as the door closed after the young soldier.  
“ When did a lover think of any one but himself ; and, sometimes, his mistress ? ”

Nella was better in the morning, at least she declared herself to be so, and Leonard had no time to make particular enquiries ; for his uncle wished to consult him on some of the needful matrimonial arrangements, and this consultation was scarcely over in time to permit his keeping an engagement at the Grange. He had but time to say to his cousin—“ I am sorry you could not see me last night ; ” and then he was gone.

Day after day, for more than a week, was nearly the same. There was business with his uncle—there was love at the Grange ; and his orphan cousin could not expect to take place of either. At dinner they rarely met ; for nearly the whole of Leonard’s time was spent at the Grange ; and even at the breakfast table he was too much hurried, or too much absorbed to address anything more to Nella than a few

commonplace enquiries after her health. There was one fonder, fairer, who hung on his words as though they had been oracles, and was ever ready to smile or to weep at his bidding. The companion of his early years—the confidante of his boyhood was superseded by a comparative stranger.

For the first day or two Nella sat in the saloon to be ready for Leonard if he chose to join her, then finding that he no longer sought her society, or desired her sympathy, she sat alone in her little study as she had been wont to do during her cousin's absence, thus resuming her former habits of seclusion and taciturnity. She was out on a ramble when Miss Evelyn returned her visit; and as the Hall had a private chapel attached to the house, in which a neighbouring curate performed the service on a Sunday, they did not even meet at the village church.

Mr. Hartnell invited the Evelyns to a formal dinner, at which all the family plate and

splendour were to have been displayed, but to Nella's great relief the invitation was declined, on account of Mr. Evelyn's suffering from a slight attack of the gout.

That Leonard should spend all his time with Frances would have appeared a folly as a matter of mere feeling in Mr. Hartnell's eyes, but as a matter of policy he made no objection to his nephew's almost living at the Grange. He had set his heart on the match, and the possession of West Mead, and sharing in the general feeling of a want of confidence in Mr. Evelyn's stability, he thought it advisable that Leonard should be with his future father-in-law as much as possible, such being that gentleman's wish; thus making the intended union so very public that it could not be broken off without causing remarks, which not only a weak-minded, but honorable man would dread to encounter.. Mr. Hartnell's head always ran on the possibility of Miss Evelyn's becoming an heiress by the death of her brother, in which case, judging by him-

self, he considered that her father might seek a higher match.

But if policy ruled the uncle, no such idea controlled the nephew. He loved Frances for herself, and herself alone; and so far from speculating on the death of her brother he would have risked his life to save him. Ever impetuous, and sometimes thoughtless, Leonard Greville might be, nay was; but of sordid views, or interested conduct he was utterly incapable. All his uncle's worldly maxims had been thrown away on the high-spirited young man, who was still frank and generous, and though, at present, their views were the same, the time might come, when the lines of love and policy no longer running parrallel, a difference might arise between the uncle and the nephew not to be reconciled.

Leonard Greville was the happiest of the happy; but 'the course of true love never did run smooth,' as he exclaimed in vexation, on finding himself summoned to the north to at-

tend the funeral of his father's cousin, an aged man, and the head of the family.

As the executor hinted at a legacy without stating any amount, and Leonard had been named after the deceased, Mr. Hartnell insisted on his nephew's obeying the summons, so Captain Greville, as he was still called, departed for the north, after taking a tender farewell of Frances, and a friendly one of the rest of the Evelyns and his cousin.

He hoped to be back in a fortnight at the latest; and as it was decided that this cousin's death need not delay the marriage, even the vexed lover was ashamed at the feelings of dread and grief with which he departed.

All had before gone right: his welcome at the Grange had always exceeded his warmest expectations—there had been no demur about the settlements—he had resigned his commission in obedience to his uncle's command; and all went merry as a marriage bell. It was foolish, unmanly to be thus cast down—to feel

a fear—but he should not meet the sweet smile of his Frances for two long weeks—it might be longer. Was not this sufficient excuse for the low spirits of her lover?

## CHAPTER VII.

IT wanted a day of the fortnight when Leonard alighted at the Hall.

“ How is Frances ?”

“ What is the amount of the legacy ?”

Were the cross questions of the uncle and nephew after a hurried “ how do you do ?”

“ What is the amount of the legacy ?” repeated Mr. Hartnell, in a tone which compelled an instant reply.

“ A hundred pounds, sir, as a compliment : I might as well have staid at home for the mere

matter of the money, but he had been kind to my father in his youth, I understand, and therefore I am glad I went. How are Frances, and her father, sir? Have you seen them lately?"

"Four days since: they were well then: at least Miss Evelyn quite well. Has she not written to you?"

"Once, the day after I went: but Beaconholm is an out of the way part of the world where the post is slow and unsure; and my own movements were so uncertain from sundry delays, and other circumstances that I could scarcely tell her how to direct, or when to expect me. I hurried back as you may imagine."

"That was quite as well under present circumstances?"

"What do you mean, sir?" demanded Leonard in alarm.

"Nothing to make you turn pale, though it is as well that you should be here. I thought Mr. Evelyn much altered when I saw him last, though he said he was better than usual, and

seemed annoyed at my remarking that he looked ill. His manner too was more nervous than I have seen it for years ; and his eye had a wild, restless gleam. I never could make out that odd look in his eye. It is like fear or madness ; I hope not the latter, as you are going to marry into the family."

"Heaven forbid!" exclaimed Leonard warmly.

"Ay, so say I. Yet the daughter's fortune might induce one to overlook it, provided that all the old man has were properly secured."

Leonard turned away in disgust at his uncle's calculating spirit ; but Mr. Hartnell did not perceive it and continued.

"We had better press on the marriage before any thing happens. There can be no use in waiting for Captain Evelyn ; the Pretender has not landed yet, and his regiment may not be ordered home as expected. It is lucky the matter is as forward as it is, or West Mead might never have been added to the Hall ; for its acquisition would be still more desirable to

the Moat, and the dashing young heir, who is already popular, might have seized upon it."

"Has the heir arrived at last?"

"Yes; he has been at the Moat some days, and paid more than one visit to the Grange they say. Look to Miss Evelyn, for Michael Paulet is brave and well favored, and not lightly esteemed, if report speaks true, by the female sex."

"I have no fear of his supplanting me with Frances," replied the lover, indignant at such a thought. "She could not change."

"The moon changes every night; and the ancients considered the moon of the feminine gender. I had no intention of putting you in a fever, so keep yourself cool, and persuade Mr. Evelyn to fix the day, lest I lose West Mead, and you your bride."

"Have you seen this Michael Paulet, sir? What is he like?"

"I have not seen him; but hear that he is handsome, frank and liberal; easy in manner,

daring in spirit, and one of the best swordsmen in Europe, or America, from which latter quarter he has but lately arrived. He was here about three weeks since for a few hours, but desired that his visit might not be named, as he had not then decided on his future plans. Since then he has determined on residing at the Moat, and keeping up the old place as in former days. The family hospitality and family grandeur are to be well maintained."

"And possibly the family doom endured," muttered his nephew.

"It may be so, being bold and brave; but his fate can be of little consequence to us. The lawyers are getting on with the deeds, though very slowly:—you are thinking of Miss Evelyn, and not attending to what I say, so be off with with you. It is to be hoped marriage will make you wiser, though I never yet knew it have such an effect. Stay: I have one piece of news; there is some chance of Nella's becoming an heiress."

“ I am very glad to hear it,” said Leonard with a warmth that contented his uncle, though it might not have contented his cousin. “ Who is to leave her a fortune?”

“ The property was left as a contingency many years since ; but there were several lives then between her and the possession ; now there is only one sickly boy, who cannot possibly long survive. The estates are worth three or four thousand a year, besides money in the funds. I must look out for a suitable match for her ; unless, indeed, we could persuade her to remain single, and then all this would come to you or your children, and make the Hartnells the wealthiest family in the county. We must think about this—Nella is not wanting in sense.”

“ Nor in worth, sir ; and will make a good use of her fortune. But my horse is waiting to take me to the Grange.”

“ That mad-brained youth will break his neck before the wedding now,” thought Mr.

Hartnell as he marked the pace at which Leonard galloped off towards the Grange.

But if the uncle anticipated an accident, not so the nephew; he only thought of the pleasure of meeting his beautiful Frances, after an absence of a fortnight, lacking one day; and so much was he occupied with this one idea that even the arrival of Michael Paulet, the heir of the hated Moat, was quite forgotten. He was in the full tide of hope and joy; but its swift current was to be checked before he reached the house.

Anxious to hasten the meeting with Frances, he made his way with all speed towards a small side gate, that led into the Park, at some distance from the house. To his great disappointment the gate was locked. Mr. Evelyn had himself pointed out that way as the shortest, and it had been his usual route before his departure. Then he had always found it open—why was it now closed? It was true that he had not been able to inform Frances of the

precise hour when she might hope to see him, but still from his letter she might have formed a shrewd guess; and surely the gate should have been left open on the mere chance that he would seek it. Not wishing to furnish matter for comment to his very honest, but very slow, and prying serving man, Solomon Pike, who from having lived with his father considered himself privileged to make remarks and take liberties, Captain Greville usually dispensed with his attendance in his visits to the Grange, and thus he was alone on the present occasion.

To go round the park to the great lodge ill suited his fiery haste, as it would lengthen the distance by two or three miles; and yet there appeared no alternative for the discomfited lover. He tried to force back the lock—he shook the gate, but all in vain. To leap the paling was to risk not only his own life, but that of a favorite horse. He might have scrambled over it himself, but then what was to become of his steed? And even if there were

any one to take charge of the animal, to ride round might be quicker than to walk across. The gate ought not to have been locked—it could never have been intended to stop him. Surely he might take this gate off its hinges, or tear down a ream of pales ; either feat would be excused in an impatient lover, and if his wounded arm should be injured in the attempt, the fair Frances would nurse him tenderly. The affianced husband of Mr. Evelyn's daughter might surely do this—and more.

His hand was on the gate when he was arrested in his purpose by a hollow sound, like that caused by the galloping of a horse over hard turf. He looked suddenly up—the sound grew louder—came nearer—a horseman was dashing towards him at full speed ; and there was no mistaking the gallant rider or his coal black steed. It was the stranger who had roused his anger on the day of his declaration of love to Frances—the stranger who had dared to look on his affianced bride—who had

dared to bear away the flower which she had touched.

His anger returned at the bare remembrance, and he stood prepared to resent the slightest show of hostility, or even impertinence. He had not forgotton the stranger's half careless, half commanding air towards himself; and his wrath was none the less for finding him where he did. What was his purpose in haunting the neighbourhood of the Grange? Had he come for the purpose of looking again on her with whose beauty he had been so much struck? And what right had he to be within the Park? Had he dared to approach the house? Had he seen Frances? Had he spoken to her? This must be enquired into. At least he seemed one who would make his way how, where, and when he chose.

Seeing that the stranger continued his head-long course in a direct line for the gate, Leonard concluding from his feat at their former meeting that it was his purpose to leap it, stopt aside in

consequence ; but he was mistaken. Checking his horse abruptly, within a yard of the paling, the stranger sprang to the ground, and drawing a key from his pocket unlocked the gate. A sound rather than an exclamation of mingled surprise and anger from Leonard caused the stranger to look up, and their eyes met. The recognition was mutual, and they continued to gaze on each other for some moments, in silence, as if each were striving to gauge the powers, mental and personal, of his opponent ; but the expression on their features grew more widely different every moment. A frown gathered deeper and deeper on the brow of Leonard, whilst a smile curled the lip of the stranger, that grew more decided as he gazed—not exactly a joyous smile, though there was mirth in it too ; but a smile of conscious superiority, mingled with the gaiety of one who was in a merry mood—at least so Leonard read it, and his annoyance was none the less for this reading.

To judge from the flashing of his black eye,

and the decided form of the mouth, it was more than probable that the stranger, when once completely roused, would be fearful in his wrath ; but the smile that relaxed those resolute lips seemed also to indicate that on ordinary occasions he was gay and good humoured—perhaps from a consciousness of powers, mental and physical, which left him no cause for dread if compelled to an encounter of wits or swords. He had learnt to be calm in the extremity of peril ; and on common occasions could smile and jest, whilst others raged. There was a something frank and uncommon too in his address—a something which might almost be termed romantic, or picturesque, in his courtesy, which gave it a charm and a power beyond the courtesy of others. When this courtesy arose from a genuine wish to please, it was almost irresistible, save, perhaps, in the case of some sensitive and high-born maiden, who might deem him too bold ; and even where he cared

but little whether it pleased or not, it had the power of controlling, if not of winning.

After looking at Greville, as we have said, for some moments in silence, the stranger, raising his hat with a graceful motion, bade him—  
“ Good day.”

The salutation was returned, but somewhat haughtily, for the easy, commanding, manner of the speaker chafed the impetuous Leonard, who would rather have crossed swords than a hundred compliments; so strong was the sudden dislike with which the gallant horseman had inspired him, a dislike amounting almost to hatred, mingled with a sort of mysterious fear, for which he could not account.

That the stranger was perfectly aware of his aversion and annoyance, and rather enjoyed than resented it, Leonard could not doubt from the bright sparkling of his eye, and the more mirthful curling of his lip; but his words and tone were only, if possible, more courteous still.

“A bright, clear day for a ride, and sunny with all. There are few such in merry England, which makes one prize them the more as rarities ; ay, and talk of them too as wonders. If you are bent to the Grange on a neighbourly visit, permit me to shorten the labour of love by offering ingress through this gate,” said the stranger, wheeling his spirited horse out of the pathway as he spoke, so as to leave the passage free. “It is a long way round by the road.”

“It is ; but that is a route which I never take, always entering by this or any other gate at my pleasure. It has always been open before, and I know not why it should be locked now,” said Greville, looking keenly at the stranger, who answered carelessly as if heedless or unconscious of his scrutiny, and equally indifferent to his churlishness, though Leonard himself was conscious of the want of courtesy in his reply.

“It is Mr. Evelyn’s will that it should be

locked: some trespasses have been committed of late, I believe."

"I doubt it not," answered Leonard pointedly, "and Mr. Evelyn has supplied you with a key?" he added interrogatively.

"Exactly so; and I count myself fortunate in having it in my power to offer you free passage, in return for your courtesy in pointing out the shortest way to the Moat some three weeks since."

The stranger's smile had become more marked, and his eye flashed with merry mischief as he observed the effect of his speech. Leonard bit his lip, and his cheek flushed to crimson, whilst his hand was, for an instant, extended towards the hilt of his sword, then as suddenly withdrawn. At that moment he would have given all he had in the world, save the love of Frances, to have crossed swords in some legitimate ground of quarrel with this stranger, whose courtesy he counted insolence, and only the more insulting as it was not to be overcome by

his own churlish demeanour, which placed himself in the wrong without affecting his foe, for as such he already considered him. To quarrel with him for an act of politeness was to place himself still more in the wrong—to refuse his offer and ride two miles out of his way would only afford fresh mirth and triumph to the man whom he almost hated—to receive his courtesy with a courtesy as marked, and meet his air of careless superiority with a manner as easy and commanding, he felt to be his wisest course; but Leonard was young, hot-headed, and little accustomed to self-control; all he could accomplish was a cold, and haughty politeness, touched with a tone of sarcasm.

“ I thank you for the offer of which I will avail myself; had Mr. Evelyn known of my coming the gate would have been open. There being no lady present before whose eyes I would play the gallant, I prefer not attempting any mad or daring feat.”

“ Each to his taste,” said the stranger, hold-

ing open the gate as Leonard passed through. “ The eagle to its soaring flight—the robin to his humble twig. A swim and a leap are all the same to Diavolo and myself; either might be dangerous to others.”

“ You are fortunate in possessing so fine an animal; and he in possessing so skilful and daring a master.”

“ Fortune ever favors the bold; and Diavolo was not won without a struggle,” replied the stranger, patting the arching neck of his good horse, whose fiery eye seemed to grow more soft at his master’s caresses; and who stirred not a limb whilst that master sprang into the saddle. “ Shall I leave you the key? You will need it as you come back; and can return it to-morrow.”

“ I thank you for the offer, but will not deprive you of a key, which you might find some difficulty in replacing. At a word from me this gate will be left unclosed.”

“ As you please,” said the stranger care-

lessly. “ Though if it were lost, or you should not find it convenient to return it, I could get it replaced ere nightfall.”

“ Indeed ! May I ask whom I have to thank for this courtesy ?” enquired Leonard, who had also mounted, and now fronted the stranger.”

“ Sir Michael Paulet of the Moat, who will be ready to offer a like courtesy on any future occasion.”

“ Sir Michael Paulet of the Moat !” repeated Leonard involuntarily.

“ The same ; and if Captain Greville will honour me with a visit, I shall be proud to do the honors of the old house to so gallant and courteous guest.”

“ I thank you, Sir Michael ; but I am little given to seek the society of strangers of whose former life I know nothing.”

“ I scarcely counted you a stranger, Captain Greville ; as we have met before ; and as for my former life, should I ever find the leisure to write a chronicle of its gallant deeds, you shall

certainly be favored with a perusal. Even without this, the future may testify of the past. I will detain you no longer from the Grange. Good day."

"Good day," answered Greville briefly.

Sir Michael bowed low—his coal black steed gave one fiery bound, then started off at full speed towards the Moat.

"And that is the owner of the Moat. I might have known it. I have an instinctive hatred for the whole race," muttered Leonard Greville as he stood gazing after Sir Michael. "He is right—we have met before." Then gathering up the reins he too galloped off, but in an opposite direction.

If his brisk though brief ride did not dispel all his vexation, at least it was driven from his mind, for a time, by the greeting of his beautiful Frances, which was all that he could desire; and the cordial reception which he met with from her father. Hour after hour passed away, and still he had much to say to Frances. To

t  
tell her how sad and dull he had been when absent; and how he had longed to meet her sweet and affectionate smile once more; and to listen to her silver tones, more dear to him than the most harmonious music. Let those who have grown wise in their self-conceit mock as they will at these follies, as they term them—these little nothings which are so much to those who love. There are no nothings in a true affection—every glance—every tone is of worth—every glance—every tone is marked, and its memory treasured. Every word of love is as a priceless jewel if the heart be but true which prompts it; and Leonard's heart was true; and she whom he loved was assured of this.

There are more precious and lovely things in this world than gold and silver—than diamonds or pearls—ay, or even than the earth in her sunset splendour, or woman in all her loveliness. There are thoughts and feelings compared to which the finest bursts of eloquence—

the most glorious flights of genius are dull and cold.

Leonard was once more happy—perfectly happy; and had no thought for anything but his present felicity, till a question from Mr. Evelyn, late in the evening, as to which way he had come, roused him once more from his dream of bliss. His mood grew cloudy at the words, and scarcely conscious of any motive, he fixed his eyes on Mr. Evelyn as he replied.

“ I came by the side gate, sir; but to my surprise, found it locked.”

“ It must be opened again now that you have returned: I dare say the vagrants who took to trespassing are gone. What did you do? Ride round, or break open the gate? I dare say Frances will forgive you if the latter.”

“ I did neither: Sir Michael Paulet came up at the moment, and let me through with his key.”

“ Sir Michael Paulet did you say? I was

not aware that you knew him. Did you converse with him?"

The most unobservant must have been struck with Mr. Evelyn's sudden, and violent agitation, which he in vain endeavoured to control or conceal. Captain Greville looked from the father to the daughter, who turned from red to white, and white to red, as he gazed upon her.

"Did you converse with Sir Michael?" enquired Mr. Evelyn again with a nervous anxiety which was startling, if not suspicious.

"We exchanged a few words," replied Greville in surprise.

"On what subjects did you converse?" questioned Mr. Evelyn eagerly, grasping the arm of his chair, as Leonard thought, to steady his whole frame. "Did he name—?"

Here Leonard's look of wonder seemed to recall him to more composure; and he broke off abruptly.

"We spoke principally of the gate's being

locked. Have you seen much of him during my absence?" said Captain Greville, assuming as indifferent an air as he could command.

This question was addressed to Frances; but Mr. Evelyn answered hurriedly with a manner betokening fear, as Leonard thought, lest his daughter should reply.

"He has been here once or twice."

"Only once or twice? I should have guessed it had been oftener from many circumstances. He spoke of the facility of procuring another key should that be lost, as though he were in habits of intimacy, and knew himself to be a privileged person. Perhaps he is too bold and forward."

"He is very bold—too bold," exclaimed Mr. Evelyn with an unusual energy, which forbade all doubt of his sincerity, and with an expression of feature which Leonard found it impossible to define;—fear, hatred, passion, all seemed mingled.

Frances said nothing, and her face being averted he could not read her thoughts in her countenance.

“ Why submit to his visits, sir, if you deem him too bold ?”

Mr. Evelyn looked down, then aside, but never into the face of the speaker; rose—sat down again—fidgetted about in a painfully nervous manner, then faltered forth in a voice scarcely above a whisper something about the propriety of being on good terms with a neighbour.

“ Sir Michael Paulet should be rather counted a stranger, sir, having so lately come into the country. Might it not have been better to have waited a little ere you admitted him to your friendship ?”

“ He is no friend,” exclaimed Mr. Evelyn with the same hurried energy as before; then stopping abruptly, he added in a calmer tone, “ I have known him too short a period for friendship.”

“At least I am glad to find, sir, that you have been sufficiently well in my absence to venture as far as the Moat; and shall hope now to see you at the Hall, which is much nearer.”

“I did venture to the Moat,” and Leonard thought he shuddered as he spoke. “Sir Michael sought me on business—business connected with the deceased Sir Francis, his relative.”

“Who perished at sea, fulfilling the old prediction, that none should die in their beds. They are a doomed race—the present heir will scarcely escape the family fate.”

“Hush!” cried Mr. Evelyn in a frightened whisper, turning his eyes wildly round the room. “They may hear you.”

There was a something so inexpressibly painful in the old man’s look as he spoke—a something so like the timid, crouching fear of the insane, that his uncle’s hint of madness came to Leonard’s mind, and he turned away in silence.

“Are you ill, Captain Greville?” asked the sweet, kind voice of Mrs. Margaret Evelyn, who, being too deaf to understand the preceding conversation, could only judge from the expression of his features that he was suffering, mentally, or bodily.

“No, quite well, my dear madam.”

The kind old lady shook her head.

“Then you are in sorrow; or anticipate some evil.”

“I anticipate much evil,” answered Leonard quickly; then, checking himself, he added: “the evil of having to say—good night.”

“Good night! yes, it is getting late, and I feel hurried and nervous,” said Mr. Evelyn catching the word, and waking as it were from a reverie into which he had fallen on Leonard’s silence.

There was no gainsaying such a hint, and the lover rose to depart.

“Good bye, Leonard. God bless you, my children, under all circumstances. Life is un-

certain—its thread may be broken by too rude a touch," said the old man solemnly, shaking his hand.

" What mean you, sir?" enquired Leonard anxiously.

" Nothing—nothing particular. What should I mean? But I am nervous to-night—very nervous: go—go."

Touched, yet pained, Leonard turned away to take leave of Frances, who walked with him into the ante-room.

" Here is a key of the side gate, which has been put aside for you."

" Thank you, love," said Leonard, taking the key and pressing the hand which gave it. " Has your father been ill since I saw him last? Do you see any change?"

" Yes, a great change. Yet he has not been ill, at least not extremely ill; but he has become sadly nervous within the last few days."

" I doubt if these visits of Sir Michael have done him any good, dear Frances.

“ I doubt the same.”

“ Do you wish he would stay away ?”

“ Most devoutly.”

There were tears in her eyes as she spoke, and Leonard’s jealous fears were more than half appeased.

“ He shall come here no more, since you do not desire his presence,” cried the lover with passion.

“ Leonard, I entreat, I implore you ;—as you love me do not provoke him—do not be rash,” exclaimed the terrified Frances.

“ I will do nothing to frighten or vex you, sweet love,” cried the enraptured lover, subdued by her beauty, tears, and tenderness.

A few minutes later, and Leonard Greville was riding towards the Hall, whilst a little in the rear rode the prosy, proverb-loving Solomon Pike, who had, unordered, chosen to consider it his duty to visit the Grange for the purpose, as he asserted, of attending his young master home. Whether a partiality for Mr. Evelyn’s

good ale, or a sober flirtation with Martha Sturt might not have influenced his motions, Captain Greville took no pains to enquire.

“ The more haste the worse speed ; and a wise man sees no better in the dark than a fool,” began Solomon, in a loud, sententious voice, after a preparatory—a-hem, to clear his throat, and attract his master’s notice.

“ Then for once we see alike,” replied Leonard drily, and without stopping, being by no means pleased with the interruption.

“ And the horses see as much as either,” continued Solomon, who disliked his master’s rapid pace, as much as his master disliked his prosy proverbs. “ Hurry Skurry loses the race, and Slow and Sure comes in the first. A broken knee makes a bad market.”

The stumbling of his own sure-footed steed, and a sort of scuffle, or scramble behind, formed such a striking and practical commentary on this observation, that the young soldier deemed it most prudent to slacken his pace, for the

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night was dark, and the way across the park was far from being smooth or level.

“ One word to a wise man is as profitable as ten to a fool,” remarked Solomon Pike, with a sort of grunt, his usual method of expressing his satisfaction, drawing up so close to his master as he spoke that a conversation might be carried on without the necessity of raising their voices. “ When the cat is away the mice will play.”

Leonard paused for an instant to consider the meaning of the last proverb, and whether it could have any connection with the one that had preceded it. Solomon’s tone was more significant, even, than usual, and the last remark chimed in with his own previous thoughts.

“ What do you mean?” enquired Leonard impetuously.

“ A wise man knoweth his own meaning ; but a fool lacketh understanding.”

“ Have done with your musty proverbs, and

tell what you have to tell plainly. Who is the cat, and who is the mouse?"

"Anger and haste hinder good counsel; and a careless watch inviteth a vigilant foe."

"Provoke me no more," exclaimed Leonard sharply. "Speak plainly, or hold your peace."

"A man that—"

"No more proverbs," cried his master, interrupting him in a tone which even Solomon Pike dared not disobey. "Speak like a fool, who tells all he knows."

"Captain Greville has been in the north; but Sir Michael Paulet abides in the south."

"Do you mean that he has been endeavouring to supplant me?" questioned the impetuous Leonard.

"Believe not all you hear, and report not all you believe," replied the serving man, in that slow and sententious tone which never failed to provoke his young master when suffering from any previous irritation, a circumstance

which Solomon seemed to know and rejoice in, as setting off, by the contrast, his own imperturbable calmness.

“ Did I not say that I would have no more proverbs? Answer my questions briefly and clearly. Has Sir Michael Paulet been much at the Grange during my absence?”

“ Much is a word which admitteth of dispute,” began the incorrigible Solomon, then, warned by a gesture of angry impatience from his master, he continued in plainer terms. “ If report speaks true, Sir Michael hath rarely failed in his daily visit.”

“ From whom did you hear this report?” enquired Leonard, remembering that Mr. Evelyn had only spoken of his having been once or twice at the Grange.

“ From Martha Sturt, Miss Evelyn’s waiting woman.”

“ Are you sure that you understood her, or that her words may be relied on?”

“ Solomon Pike doth not believe too lightly,

and more especially a woman ; but the waiting damsel's words were confirmed by others."

" And doth she add, that Sir Michael hath sought to supplant me ?"

" So it would seem from her hints. Beware of the Geese when the Fox preachea."

" By that irreverent proverb, you cannot mean that Miss Evelyn favors his suit," exclaimed the lover, reddening with anger.

" Who shall say ? A woman and a glass are never out of danger ; and this stranger they say is handsome, and ready with tongue and gold. He is from a foreign land, and has many foreign treasures, and when could a female resist a gift of a foreign fashion, and glittering show ?"

" Will you swear that Sir Michael hath offered such gifts, and that Miss Evelyn hath accepted them ?"

" The word of an honest man is as strong as an oath. A passionate man rides a horse that runs away with him. I did not say that

things had as yet come to this pass with the lady, though they have with her waiting woman, who flounces about with her brooch and gold ring, the gift of Sir Michael's outlandish man, as though there were honor not shame in so doing, flouting him who speaks good plain English for the swarthy cut-throat, who can scarce talk to be understood, save with his eyes and his grimaces. This coming in of foreigners is a pest to the land, turning the heads of our giddy maidens. If you do but attempt to give the flirt good counsel, she flies at you with a keen tongue, saying Master Carlos knows better how to talk to females. But Martha Sturt was ever a false coquette, and it may be like mistress like maid."

" Hold your false, libellous tongue, nor dare to speak thus of one so far above you, whose beauty is not more perfect than her truth and purity," exclaimed the lover in anger. " I see it all clearly now ; it is but a matter of rivalry between you and this swarthy Carlos, as to

which should stand first with Martha Sturt : I should have guessed this at once from your bitterness, and stopped you long since. Take heed that you tell me no more lies ; or the flat of my sword may teach you the respect due to Miss Evelyn."

" It was not thus that your noble father was wont to speak to the faithful servant, who nearly lost his own life to save him from being cut down by brigands, and who has sworn never to leave his son, but devote himself to his service," said Solomon Pike very slowly, drawing himself up with a stately and reproachful air.

" That son would never reproach you, were you to be forsaken and desert him," replied Leonard with vexation, conscious of an excess of warmth. " You are never in fault, but you bring forward this to shame me out of my anger, and convict me of filial ingratitude. When I marry, you shall retire on a pension, a pension sufficiently handsome to induce Martha

Sturt to jilt this grimacing Carlos for your sake."

"I will say nought against the pension Master Leonard, since you have set your heart on thus showing your gratitude for my humble services; but I swore to your father on his death bed that I would never leave you, or fail to give you good counsel, at which the poor gentleman seemed very much comforted, and smiled. I am a christain man and cannot break my oath."

"I took thee for a solemn fool before, but I verily believe thou art a shrewd knave after all," replied his master, beguiled of a smile despite his annoyance. "But for the rivalry in this matter, I might pay more heed to thy words."

"Fore-warned—fore-armed. An angry man opens his mouth and shuts his eyes; a man of coolness and understanding opens his eyes, and shuts his mouth."

"If I could believe it Sir Michael should

rue his impertinence. I long to cross swords with that man," exclaimed Leonard in wrath.

" Be ready to hear, but careful to contrive, and slow to execute. The lady may be true, after all, and if false is not worth the fighting for. No one crosses swords with Sir Michael Paulet, they say, without being the worst thereof," said the sententious serving-man rather quickly, beginning to be alarmed at the effect of his own discourse. " Doubtless that coquettish waiting damsel's intimations deserve little credit. How should she be acquainted with her young lady's mind?"

" Ah ! how indeed ; for Miss Evelyn is not one to gossip lightly with her waiting-woman. Shame on me for having listened so long ; and greater shame for having descended to prying questions, as though I doubted her truth," cried the frank-hearted Leonard with a blush of shame. " Here, take the key and open the gate."

The gate was opened, and, dashing through,

Leonard stayed not his speed till he reached the Hall ; the goodness of the road presenting no further obstacles to his eager haste.

“ As well take service with a mad-man as a lover,” muttered the vexed Solomon, as he galloped after the young soldier. “ If it were not for my oath to his father I could soon get a richer master ; but he would be lost without my good counsel. To think of fighting with such a swordsman as Sir Michael. If he would but take example by me, and be cool, I should not be obliged to keep things back as I am now. The pension was cleverly settled. That pert minx, *Martha Sturt*, shall give back the ring and the brooch, and flout that swarthy cut-throat to my face, or she shall have none of it ; and perhaps not then—I may look out for one younger and prettier. She who plays with all comers will not win the stakes.”

Mr. Hartnell and Nella had retired to rest, the servant said ; and though Leonard saw a light beneath the door of the little study of the

latter, he made no attempt to obtain an interview, but rather hurried past. He no longer desired his cousin as a confidante, and never considered that she might think him cold and unkind, for neither seeing her, nor even leaving her a message after his return from the north. Their greeting in the morning was friendly, but no more; and brief on both sides.

## CHAPTER VIII.

“ How did you find Mr. Evelyn?” enquired Mr. Hartnell of his nephew after they had retired to the library for the purpose of discussing business.

“ Very nervous as you said, sir; but still very cordial,” answered Leonard, unwilling to allow his suspicions even to himself.

“ Are you going there this morning?”

“ Certainly, sir; as soon as we have finished this business.”

“ Then I think you had better press the

marriage, as I advised you yesterday. Should anything happen to the old man, Captain Evelyn might not feel inclined to pay his sister's dower."

"I have no fear of that, but shall press the marriage from affection to Frances," answered Leonard, involuntarily moving away a step from his worldly uncle.

"Since you intend to act prudently, I shall not waste time in showing the folly of your motives," observed his uncle sarcastically.

"I have bad news for you, Nella," said Mr. Hartnell, as the uncle and niece sat together at dessert.

"Bad news!" repeated Nella, turning, if possible, paler than she was before. "Is Leonard ill?"

"Pooh, girl! your head is always running upon Leonard, as if there were no one else in the world. This might be permitted in Miss Evelyn; but not in you."

"I see that you are well, Sir, I know that

no harm has befallen nurse Lee, is it strange then that my thoughts should turn to the only being in the world who takes any interest in my welfare?"

"Perhaps not, so you need not blush," replied Mr. Hartnell more kindly, touched by the sad humility of her reply. "My news has no connection with Leonard, but young Wilmer. From my letters of this morning, I learn that there is some chance of his recovery."

"I am most heartily glad to hear it, Sir; for he is an only child, and his poor mother a widow."

"Are you a fool, or a hypocrite?" enquired her uncle, looking searchingly at his niece.

"The former I hope, Sir, if I must be either."

"The former you must be, if you really rejoice in this intelligence. Have you forgotten that the boy's recovery will deprive you of wealth?"

"And of what use would wealth be to me?"

"You could at least repay the money ex-

pended by myself in your infancy and girlhood, that the pride of the family might not be hurt by one of its members living in poverty, or dying of starvation," replied her uncle, more sharply than usual.

" I had forgotten that, sir."

" So it appears ; and the remainder could go at your death to Leonard's children, to keep up the family property ; or, with such a fortune, you might make a high match : many things are overlooked for the sake of wealth."

" A high match would but make those many things more conspicuous," answered his niece, with a bitterness which she could not suppress. Her uncle could not understand the torture which he was inflicting on that blighted, sensitive heart.

" Ay, so it would. Better that all should go at your death to keep up the dignity of the Hartnells," replied her uncle in the same cold, and calculating tone. " We are not a very long lived family, at least

the females have never been; and your mother died early," he added as if pursuing a train of thought, rather than addressing his companion.

The scream of a peacock beneath the window broke off the conversation, and saved Nella from the necessity of making a reply. Mr. Hartnell rose and stood for some minutes admiring the beautiful bird, as it spread out its tail to the sun.

"Bring me some biscuit, Nella. He deserves it for his beauty—does he not? Look at the graceful play of that purple neck. He always reminds me of Lady Clara Hartnell, the daughter of the Duke of Wincanton, the highest match, and the greatest beauty in our family; so graceful, tall, and queenlike in her air. The way in which that bird displays his tail, glowing with all rich colours, must have been like Lady Clara, dancing a minuet in her splendid presentation suit. I like peacocks about an old place; they are proud and beautiful birds, and

seem proper appendages to an ancient family. To be sure their scream is not musical, and Lady Clara was a vixen, but one would excuse many things on account of their beauty."

"Excuse many things on account of their beauty!" repeated Nella in a low, sad voice, which either did not reach her uncle, or failed to attract his attention.

Mr. Hartnell threw the biscuit to the beautiful bird, and Nella turned away, sick—sick at heart.

Nothing had been said about seeing him on the morrow, and it was with contending feelings that Leonard pursued his way to the Grange. In spite of his declaration of disbelief to Solomon—in spite of the warm greeting and tender parting of Frances, there were doubts and suspicions in his heart, though he would not allow it even to himself; doubts and suspicions to be laid at rest, or roused into full activity, according to the character of coming events. That Mr. Evelyn was anxious to conceal the fre-

quency of Sir Michael Paulet's visits seemed certain; but his being a welcome visitor to either father or daughter, appeared by no means as certain; indeed, the latter had more than intimated her dislike of this new comer; and Frances could never stoop to deceit. His own dislike, his hatred rather, to Paulet, increased every hour; and his desire to cross swords with him if he had dared to endeavour to supplant him, increased in the like proportion.

He saw no trace of this hatred rival, as he chose to consider him, on his way to the Grange, and his mood grew a little less fiery.

Mrs. Martha Evelyn was sitting alone in the room into which he was ushered, and her placid, kindly smile, and cordial welcome, went far to remove his doubts.

Her brother, she said, was unwell, and had not quitted his dressing room; but Frances, she doubted not, would be with him in a few minutes; and the smile that accompanied these latter words, chasing away the saddened look

with which she had spoken of her brother, brought a richer glow on the lover's cheek—a brighter light into his eye.

The old lady was seated at an open window, employed in one of those elaborate pieces of embroidery, which excite the wonder of the damsels of the present century; for her eyesight was perfect, though her hearing was impaired. Thinking this a good opportunity for engaging her to plead for an early marriage, Captain Greville took a seat beside her, and opened his case with all a lover's eloquence.

Feeling that the blighting of her own happiness had been partly owing to delay, Mrs. Margaret was far from being inexorable, and Leonard was pouring forth his thanks and raptures in a rather unintelligible style, when these thanks and raptures were suddenly suspended by the murmur of voices coming up from the garden below, for the room in which they were sitting was not on the ground floor.

He gazed eagerly out of the window. Ad-

vancing up an alley exactly fronting were Sir Michael Paulet, and Frances Evelyn, engaged in earnest, and, as it seemed to the observer, interesting conversation. The face of the latter, from being much bowed and averted, was concealed from the scrutiny of Leonard, who was above, but the countenance of the former was distinctly visible, from his walking with his hat off, as it seemed in reverence to the lady. Its expression was hopeful, earnest, ardent; and even the jealous rival, who started and turned pale at the sight, was obliged to admit the manly beauty of this hated stranger.

His dress was even more handsome and carefully adjusted than on their first meeting—the coat was of a finer material—the ruffles of a more beautiful lace; and the black ribbon round his throat, after the fashion of the day, was adjusted with a careless grace that became him well. His manner, too, appeared still more refined and polished; either from the influence of the feelings working within, or the presence

of the beautiful being beside him, the air of superiority which had so much annoyed Leonard being replaced by one of mingled respect and ardent admiration, which could have offended none, and might have flattered any. Even his eyes had lost their bold, free gaze, and their flashing pride was softened by some gentler, deeper feeling.

And what was the feeling which had power to soften the look and tone of this bold, proud stranger?

No words reached Leonard's ears; but as he marked the impassioned, yet respectful gaze of the speaker—his earnest attitude—his head bent down to catch the faintest whisper of his fair companion, he doubted not what that feeling was. Michael Paulet and Leonard Greville were rivals—his hatred was justified, at least to his own heart.

The rich full tones of the speaker ceased, and Frances checked her steps, whilst her eager companion bent lower still to catch her reply.

That reply was too faint for Leonard to distinguish even one word, nor could he obtain a glimpse of her features.

Sir Michael would have answered, but, waving her hand as if to forbid further speech, Miss Evelyn withdrew, leaving her late companion gazing after her as she entered the house by a side door.

Leonard's eyes had at first followed Frances ; but when she was no longer visible they were turned on Paulet, in whose handsome countenance he read not only a hopeful love, but a resolute will, and anticipated triumph. If his first feeling on the departure of the lady had been disappointment, that feeling had disappeared ere his rival's eye was again turned upon him.

Leonard spoke not a word ; but his teeth were pressed on his lower lip, till the blood sprang beneath the pressure ; and one hand was fiercely clenched, whilst the other sought his sword.

Years, and years of suffering too, had not deadened Mrs. Margaret Evelyn's observation or sympathy: she read his purpose in the wrathful frown of the lover—she needed no speech to tell his thoughts.

Before he could utter the furious defiance which hung on his lips, as he bent far out of the window, her gentle touch was on his arm—her gentle words were in his ear.

“Thou shalt do no murder! Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.”

Soft as were the tones, they sank deep into the heart of the wrathful lover. Leonard started at this sudden rebuke to his unuttered thoughts, and his clutching fingers withdrew from the hilt of his sword, as he gazed on the placid speaker. A stern reproof might have left him untouched; but he read pity and regret in the features of her who spoke—the pity of a woman who had known what suffering was—the regret of a christian who had learnt to love the commands of God above the behests of men.

A blush of shame spread over his cheeks, pallid before from the excess of his wrath; and his fiery eyes were lowered beneath the steady gaze of his gentle reprobate.

A murmur from below made him turn again to the garden. Mr. Evelyn's valet was delivering a message from his master, to the purport that he requested the presence of Sir Michael, who instantly followed the servant.

As Paulet was passing beneath the window he accidentally raised his head, and the eyes of the rivals encountered. The glance was like a flash of lightning—so vivid—so instantaneous. A deeper frown came on the brow of Leonard, and the lip of the stranger was curled with pride and anger as he strode into the house.

“What would you do?” asked Mrs. Margaret, so standing that Leonard could not brush by her without pointed rudeness.

“Cross swords with my haughty rival, and force him to relinquish the hopes which he has so presumptuously dared to entertain,” ex-

claimed Leonard in passion. “ His insolence shall not go unpunished.”

“ Be still, rash youth ! The life which the Lord hath given to be used for His glory—shall sinful man risk, or take, for a fancied wrong ?”

“ For a fancied wrong ?—it is no fancied wrong. Did you not see how he dared to gaze on her whom I love as my life ? Did you not mark the devotion—the passion that beamed in his flashing eye as he poured forth his leprous words into her ear ? Did you not mark how he waited breathlessly for her reply ?” questioned the lover impetuously.

“ But you heard not that reply. How know you but her words may have crushed those hopes, if such hopes there were,” observed Mrs. Margaret soothingly.

“ There were such hopes : a lover’s eye could not be deceived, and to have dared to breathe them to my affianced bride, is too great an insult to pass unpunished.”

“ Do you doubt the truth, the affection of

Frances?" asked Mrs. Margaret in the same gentle tone, which shamed him out of his vehemence, from its contrast to his own passionate accents.

"I know not what I doubt," answered Leonard moodily.

"Doubt not Frances: she loves you truly—entirely."

"Bless you for saying so. Then why does she walk with—why listen to another?"

"We women are but feeble creatures, controlled by the strong will, and stronger arm of man. My niece did but go to gather a rose from the further end of the walk; you saw it in her hand, and may guess for whom it was intended." Here the old lady smiled almost archly, and Leonard's frown became less stern. "Sir Michael must have joined her against her expectation, and I scruple not to add against her wish. If won by her beauty he ventured to speak of his admiration, you may rest assured that her answer would check, not encourage,

such declarations. A stranger—so lately arrived, he has probably not heard of her engagement."

"I doubt this last, though I would willingly believe the former. He saw—he felt that I loved her at our first meeting; yet his bold, admiring gaze was fixed on her beauty. But I will not doubt Frances, not unless she herself should compel me to do so. But what am I to think of her father? Day after day during my absence has this stranger been at the Grange, yet Mr. Evelyn would have me believe that he has been here but once or twice. This sudden intimacy is surprising—its concealment suspicious."

"Blame not a brother to his only sister, Captain Greville," said Mrs. Margaret, reproachfully. "He is timid and nervous, the effect of suffering in his younger years, and failing health; but no stain has ever been cast on his honor. What he has said shall be done—he will do; and for the rest, you must have misunderstood him. I say this boldly, though my

deafness prevents my knowing to what conversation you particularly allude, as I hear little but what is addressed to myself. My brother was intimate with the late Sir Francis, whom he assisted, I believe, in some pecuniary difficulty, and hence come the visits of his heir, who has found some memorandum concerning this loan among his deceased cousin's papers.

“ But Mr. Evelyn's agitation—his altered manner”—suggested Leonard, doubtfully.

“ Alas ! Captain Greville, that is a subject of far greater regret to me, than it can possibly be to you ; but it is a thing to be grieved for, not explained, save by his early suffering, and now failing health, as I said before. There is no accounting for any increase in that nervous agitation, which is so distressing to all who love him ; but any unusual excitement, either painful or pleasurable, is almost sure to produce it ; even the mere necessity of deciding on a trivial point. You may have had some share in its present increase, his daughter's

marriage being to him a most agitating and momentous affair."

"But he was not as he is now when I went to the North."

"The nearer approach of a parting with his daughter may occasion this, or having the sudden death of the late Sir Francis recalled to his mind. You know how distressed he is at any allusion to this infirmity, and must promise me not to make any comment upon it. You will promise me this, will you not?"

"I can refuse you nothing, my dear madam."

"Thank you, Captain Greville: your words encourage me to be still more exacting. Promise me not to quarrel with Sir Michael. Your duty to God—your affection for Frances, alike demand this. Think what she would suffer were she the cause of bloodshed, and it might be death."

"You try me hardly," said Leonard, colouring; "but I said I could refuse you nothing. There is an air of careless, conscious, superiority

about that man which it is galling to brook ; but I will neither seek him, nor, should we meet, provoke a quarrel. If he persist in his suit to Frances after knowing my claims, let him look to himself : the blame of the strife must then rest with him. This is all I can promise ; and perhaps even this is more than I shall be able to perform."

" Say not so, Leonard. Rather look within, and strive, by God's blessing, to calm and control that fiery spirit. You are young, and know not as yet what trials may await you. Bear ever in mind that he who uses the sword, shall perish by the sword ; and that the Lord has promised his favour to the meek and the forgiving, not to the proud and the revengeful. The lowly shall be exalted, and the high cast down. You have no mother now, think that she speaks through me ; and let my words dwell on your mind. Fear not that Sir Michael will seek to win Frances, or if he should, and needs must be, I will speak to him myself."

“ Thank you,” said Leonard gratefully, touched by her gentle exhortation. “ But here comes Frances ; I hear her light step in the passage.”

“ Then I will leave you together, relying on your honor not to pain her by even a hint of our late conversation : she is gentle, timid, and ill formed to bear the blighting of adversity, or the strife of strong passions. She is a delicate flower, Leonard ; you must tend her with care.”

The lover’s only reply was a warm greeting of his beautiful mistress, whose loveliness was, if possible, increased by a brighter bloom on her cheek, and a slight flurry in her manner, whether caused by Leonard’s expressions of tenderness, or her previous interview with Sir Michael, he did not pause to consider. The rose in her hand had been gathered from a tree which he had planted in her garden when children together ; and that rose had been gathered for him.

If his mood had been cloudy of late, it was all sunshine now. Mrs. Margaret had said—doubt not Frances, she loves you truly—entirely ; and the words—the looks of Frances confirmed the truth of the assertion. There was nothing to rouse the suspicions which her aunt had allayed, and Leonard was again the trusting, happy lover. Even his entreaties for an early union met with no stern denial ; and he blushed at the folly of dreading a successful rival in Sir Michael Paulet. One circumstance alone was calculated to give him any annoyance, and that was the non-appearance of Mr. Evelyn at dinner. He had been harassed with business in the morning, and felt too much fatigued, and too unwell to quit his room, was the message delivered by his valet, with a complimentary addition to Captain Greville, stating his distress at not feeling equal to see him.

Leonard's quick eye was turned first on the aunt, and then on the niece, but the placid, encouraging look of the former ; and the trusting smile

of the latter forbade all doubt or anxiety, though Miss Evelyn, he fancied, turned pale at the announcement.

Leonard would fain have lingered till his usual hour for retiring; but a message from Mr. Evelyn that he wished to speak with his daughter, induced him to depart ere night had set in. When, or by what route Sir Michael had left the Grange he neither knew, nor chose to enquire.

Leonard's early departure was so exceedingly annoying to Solomon Pike, who had scarcely taken his seat in the servants' hall, at the Grange, ere he was summoned to attend his young master, that he continued sulkily silent the whole of the ride, a circumstance quite unobserved by Greville, whose thoughts were occupied with one, who bore no resemblance to his sententious serving-man.

Solomon had counted on being questioned, and his vexation was increased by finding that expectation disappointed—a circumstance the

more provoking, as he was not possessed of any knowledge of sufficient importance to warrant his commencing a conversation, when his young master showed a disinclination to talk.

“ Returned so soon,” remarked Mr. Hartnell in surprise, as his nephew entered the saloon.

“ Mr. Evelyn is unwell, sir ; and his daughter seemed to wish to be with him.”

“ Nothing serious, I hope. Did you press the marriage?”

“ With the ladies, sir ; Mr. Evelyn I could not see.”

“ Was he too ill to see any one then?”

“ He was too unwell to see me, sir, having been harassed with business in the morning,” answered Leonard, unwilling to own that he had admitted Sir Michael, though the remembrance of this admission, brought back to his mind by the question, was galling in the extreme.

“ Business is enough to upset Mr. Evelyn any day ; but this looks well for your hopes.”

Leonard was far from feeling assured of this, but he made no reply, and the conversation turned upon other subjects. Nella had retired early; and the uncle and nephew were left to themselves.

## CHAPTER IX.

Anxious to learn the state of Mr. Evelyn's health, Captain Greville sought the Grange at an early hour, hoping to see the daughter, even should the father be too unwell to receive him.

"My master is too ill, sir, to leave his room, or see any visitors," was the reply to Leonard's question, as to the state of Mr. Evelyn's health.

"I am very sorry to hear it," replied Captain Greville, throwing the bridle to the under servant, and preparing to enter the house.

“ My master is too ill, sir, to see any visitors to-day,” repeated the sturdy serving man, standing directly in the doorway, so as to impede all entrance.

The butler was absent, and his present deputy chanced to be one, who had never forgiven Leonard for some boyish trick of former days, and was resolved to be as insolent as he dared.

“ I am sorry to hear of Mr. Evelyn’s illness, and would learn particulars from his daughter, who expects my visit,” said the young soldier, haughtily.

“ Miss Evelyn bade me say, sir, that she was with my master, and could see no one.”

“ Miss Evelyn could never have intended that message for me,” observed Leonard, reddening with anger, not only at the words, but at the mode of their delivery. “ Your lady knew that I should call this morning.”

“ That was the order that Miss Evelyn gave me herself, sir.”

“ There has been some mistake, which a few words will rectify. Shew me to Mrs. Margaret.”

“ Mrs. Margaret is not at home, Sir : she went early this morning to my Lord Erdiston’s, and will not return before nightfall.”

“ Has Mr. Evelyn sent for a medical man?” enquired Leonard quickly, struck with the improbability of his sister’s leaving the house for the day were her brother seriously ill.

“ No, Sir, master seldom sees a doctor.”

“ Go with my compliments to Miss Evelyn, and say I will not detain her five minutes, if she will only honor me with her presence.”

“ My mistress bade me say, sir, that she was engaged.”

“ Deliver my message, said Leonard, interrupting him.

The tone was too peremptory to be disobeyed; but the man departed with a sulky air, shutting the door in Leonard’s face, and looking very much as if he would have locked it had he dared.

His absence was brief; but it seemed an age to the impatient lover.

“ Miss Evelyn’s compliments, sir; and she sent a note to you this morning to beg you not to call.”

“ Bid Martha Sturt come hither,” said Captain Greville, after a moment’s pause. “ I have received no note.”

“ Mrs. Martha Sturt is engaged about my lady’s laces, and—”

“ Do as I bid you,” exclaimed the angry Leonard, cutting short the man’s reply.

The serving-man obeyed, looking still more sullen than before, leaving Leonard to calm his anger as he could by striding up and down before the entrance.

After waiting thus a most unreasonable time, the coquettish Martha made her appearance with a jaunty air, and a turned up nose, that bespoke the high opinion in which she held her own perfections. The brooch and the ring of

which Solomon had spoken, as being the gifts of Sir Michael's Spanish servant, were also there ; and it was clear from the woman's whole demeanour, and the jerking forward of her right shoulder, in spite of the affected smile on her lips, that she was little inclined to favor the suit of the lover before her, though her hope of propitiatory presents, or her unconquerable spirit of coquetry might prevent her driving him to despair. Either another had bribed, or she hoped would bribe her high ; at any rate there was a chance of making more from two jealous rivals, than from one accepted and confiding lover.

Her long delay had chafed the impatient Leonard ; and her pert, mincing manner, confirming Solomon's report, was little calculated to allay his displeasure, or induce him to propitiate her favor by gifts or flattering words.

“ Is Mr. Evelyn very ill ? ” enquired Greville abruptly.

“ Too ill to see you, sir,” replied the waiting-

maid pertly, with a strong stress on the *you*, which was not unmarked by the lover.

“ The servant tells me that Miss Evelyn has sent a note ; yet none has reached me.”

“ That is no fault of my mistress’s, sir : the note was sent, as I can bear witness, and Thomas was told to give you that message.”

“ There has been some mistake, which one word of explanation would set to rights. If you could but obtain me five minutes’ audience of Miss Evelyn—”

“ I could not presume to do no such thing, sir,” replied Martha Sturt with a pert toss of the head, not waiting to hear his conclusion of the sentence. “ My young lady is engaged with master, and won’t see you I know.”

“ But she will scarcely remain with Mr. Evelyn all day.”

“ May be she will—may be she won’t ; I can’t pretend to say what my young lady may do.”

“ Such close confinement will injure her health.”

“ There’s plenty who love her to look after that, sir ; and one who worships the buckle of her shoe. And there is no chance of her being dull to-day, even if she should see no visitor, having so many furrin wonders to look at.”

Leonard turned in the direction pointed out by the saucy waiting maid, and saw, ostentatiously displayed on a table in the hall, some cabinets and other articles of exquisite workmanship, and foreign make.

“ Where do these things come from ? ” enquired Leonard, growing pale with anger in anticipation of the answer to be given.

“ They are presents from Sir Michael Paulet, who is handsome and generous to my young lady,” replied Martha Sturt, with a smile of triumphant mischief.

“ And what has he given to her waiting-woman to purchase her venal tongue ? ” demanded the indignant Leonard.

“ Smiles and kind words, not frowns and ill names,” exclaimed the angry Martha.

“Cozening words and gold rings, which have transformed a sober and decent waiting-woman into a flaunting and ill-mannered flirt. Tell your mistress that she shall hear from me shortly.”

So saying, Leonard strode out of the hall, with the satisfaction of hearing, as he mounted his horse, the spiteful titter of Martha, chortled by the louder laugh of the insolent Thomas.

“The horse, left to his own good guidance, took the nearest way back to the Hall, and the side gate into the Park was nearly reached, ere Leonard could think of aught but the words of the saucy waiting-maid, when, as ill luck would have it, just at the same moment, Sir Michael Paulet, attended by a servant, rode up on the other side.

“Open the gate for Captain Greville,” exclaimed the baronet, doffing his hat to the angry lover, who could do no less than return the compliment, though inwardly chafing at what he considered an insolent courtesy.

The foreign looking attendant, the identical cut-throat Carlos, who had caused Solomon's wrath, rode forward to obey the order.

Leonard passed out with a stately bow, and a still more stately—"Good day, Sir Michael, I thank you." Then, seeing that his rival was on the point of entering the park, he added:—"If you purpose a visit to the Grange it will be but lost time; Mr. Evelyn is too unwell to receive strangers, and his daughter abides in his room."

"Nevertheless I will ride on; Mr. Evelyn, perchance, may be better by the time I arrive; and it will be but friendly to ask after his health. Good day, Captain Greville. I thank you!" replied Sir Michael, setting spurs to his horse as he concluded, and leaving his rival with a flushed cheek and flashing eyes.

"Insolent! with that triumphant, derisive smile, and mocking tone. He shall rue this impertinence," cried the angry Leonard, looking after his foe, then he, too, setting spurs to his horse, galloped off to a rising ground, the sum-

mit of which commanded a view of the entrance to the Grange ; and here he stood, chafing and fretting, lashing his anger into greater fury by the eager intensity of his watching.

“ Ha ! there is no delay—no demur. The door is thrown open as to a welcome guest. My hated rival is received, where I was denied admittance ; and his horse does not wait—his stay may be long. False ! false ! both Frances and her father. This the return for my doting love.”

His brows were knit, his teeth were set, and his clenched fist was shaken at the Grange, in defiance of this hated rival. Then came a softening of this furious mood ; and he began to doubt the possibility of his beautiful Frances being so false, so deceitful. She who seemed truth and gentleness itself, could she lie ?—could she be fickle ? There was her note, that might explain all things as he wished. Most probably it was now at the Hall, and turning his horse’s head thither, he galloped home with a speed which betokened the irritation of the rider.

“ Is there any note from Miss Evelyn ?” demanded Leonard of Solomon Pike, who was loitering near the entrance, springing from his panting steed as he spoke.

“ Yes, sir ; and I have been waiting about to give it you,” answered Solomon, forgetting all his proverbs in the eagerness of his curiosity, and seeing no need to state that he had been trying for the last quarter of an hour to peep into the note which he presented.

Leonard tore open the missive : its contents were brief, hurried, and unsatisfactory, exhibiting, as he considered, more anxiety to prevent his intended visit than to soften his disappointment. The excuse for not admitting him was the same as that which he had received from the servants at the Grange. Her father was so restless, nervous, and unwell, that he could not see Captain Greville, and needed his daughter’s constant presence to soothe and calm him. She expressed some disappointment at

this; but her lover considered not enough for the occasion.

“ When did this note arrive ?” asked Greville abruptly, addressing Solomon, who had been watching his master’s countenance, and making his own observations thereon.

“ Very soon after you went, sir, the groom rode hard to stop you; for Martha Sturt had said that her mistress would be very vexed and angry if you called.”

“ Would she ?” exclaimed Leonard gnashing his teeth.

“ I wonder he did not meet you on the road, sir,” remarked the curious Solomon, looking into his master’s face with an assumption of simplicity.

“ I went round by the long clump, which may account for this. Did the servant leave any message besides, or say what ailed Mr. Evelyn ?”

“ I was sure it would come to this at last, though my young master would not ask a ques-

tion last night, and would not heed me the night before," thought Solomon Pike assuming an air of greater gravity on the instant, and preparing his proverbs as usual.

"No message exactly, sir; only when the heart is full, the tongue will speak; and as a bird is known by his note, so is a man by his discourse. The eye—"

"No more proverbs," exclaimed Leonard impatiently.

"A wilful man must not be thwarted; but a good maxim is never out of season."

"What again? Too much of a good thing is good for nothing: there is one of your own proverbs back again to choke you. To the point without more ado, or I shall be off? How is Mr. Evelyn?"

"Pretty much of a muchity as he usually is, according to the groom."

"I thought so," muttered Leonard aside.

"And Miss Evelyn was very anxious that I should not call this morning."

“ Very anxious, and bade Martha tell Richard to ride as fast as he could. The young lady is not like to be dull though by all accounts, for Sir Michael Paulet sent over some outlandish presents this morning, and, moreover, is expected to dine at the Grange. A ferret can creep into a hole, where a hound cannot.”

“ Are you certain that Sir Michael is to dine at the Grange to-day? He may not know that Mr. Evelyn is too ill to see visitors.”

“ The groom said he was to dine with Miss Evelyn. It is good to have two strings to your bow, though you cannot use both together.”

The exclamation that burst from Leonard’s lips was rendered indistinct by the very excess of his wrath.

“ What do the people in the neighbourhood say of this Sir Michael Paulet?” he questioned after a brief pause.

“ All praise the purse that is filled with gold; and good cheer brings a good report,”

replied Solomon slowly ; then, checked by his master's angry gesture, he spoke without proverbs. “ This stranger from foreign parts keeps an open house, and an open hand. Those who call have good meat and ale, and those who ask have gold. There are servants flocking from all parts to take place, sturdy serving men, and pretty young maidens ; and so much is given away that the common folk are beginning to think nothing of the other families round. It was but this morning I heard a fellow, drunk with the ale of the Moat, flinging up his hat for Sir Michael, and calling your good uncle stingy. I hope all this gold may be honestly come by ; but soon won, soon spent they say ; and that Carlos does not look to me over honest, turning the heads of silly women with rings and brooches. Then there are strange looking chests it is said, very heavy, and very strong, that were never made in christian parts.”

“ And what say the gentry of Sir Michael ? ”

“ Pretty much as the common folk say :—

‘ Where the gold chinks loud,  
There follows the crowd.’

High or low, there is no matter for that. He may dine with the best, and make love to the prettiest any day that he pleases.”

“ Is this all that you know?”

“ All that I know now, sir; and,

‘ Better a small fish,  
Than an empty dish.’

“ No wonder she was so anxious that I should not call; and her saucy waiting-maid was right: there is no chance of her being dull with her foreign gifts to examine, and her foreign lover to listen to,” thought Leonard bitterly, as he stalked into the house.

“ What is the meaning of a servant from the Grange coming hither at full speed immediately after your departure, with a note from Miss Evelyn? And why have you returned thus quickly?” enquired Mr. Hartnell coming out

of his study on hearing his nephew's step in the hall.

Leonard looked in his uncle's face for a moment without speaking, then, taking his arm, led him back into the study, and closed the door. Shocked, astounded by the evidence of Miss Evelyn's falsehood, he had given no thought as to what should be his next step: this meeting with his uncle decided him. It would be a relief to pour out his grief and anger to some one, and from Mr. Hartnell he was certain of sympathy for his disappointment, if not in his motives. They had agreed in desiring the union—they would agree in regretting its being broken off; so far at least their feelings would be in unison.

Awed by his nephew's haggard look, Mr. Hartnell took the seat pointed out to him in silence; and it was a strange and painful sight to watch the workings of that wordly mind, whilst the high-spirited and devoted lover was pouring forth with all the eloquence of passion-

ate feeling the story of his trust—his doubts—his wrongs. The one felt as if his heart were rent in twain by a stroke—the bloom of his youth departed—the hope of his manhood blasted. He formed no plan for the future—there was but one feeling in his heart—one thought in his mind: his Frances—his own—his beautiful—his fond—was false. Even hatred of his rival was for a time merged in regret for the deceitfulness of his mistress. To think that so fair a form should conceal so black a heart!

The other felt that his favourite scheme was thwarted—that the Hartnells had been insulted—their family splendour lessened—and his projects crossed by a nervous hypochondriac; but his anger was naturally directed more to the father than the daughter: and even whilst his nephew was still speaking, his mind was employed in forming new plans by which he might repair the present evil, and increase the family wealth and power. The grief of the

lover was regarded with the coldness of the habitual worldling—his burst of bitter agony received with indifference or contempt, inward if not outward; and his resentful eloquence passed over as the raving of a madman, or a lover, terms nearly synonymous with him. The uncle was all calculation—the nephew all passion; and by some rare chance, for once their hopes and wishes were the same.

Leonard had stopped for no questioning—stayed for no comment; but when the rush of his passion, like the rush of a sudden flood, was over, he leant pale and haggard against a book case, with his flashing eyes fixed on the ground.

There was a silence of some minutes, during which time Mr. Hartnell, by considering and comparing, arrived at the conclusion that things might not be as bad as he had at first believed them; and that the game might yet be retrieved by a skilful move. There had been a check, but it was not yet check-mate. The mind of his

nephew during the same period had been a chaos of wild thoughts and desperate resolves.

“Don’t be a fool, Leonard; but think, and be a man.”

Leonard started at his uncle’s voice, for he had forgotten his presence; but Mr. Hartnell, without noticing his sudden movement, proceeded.

“Things are not as bad as I thought at first, though somewhat suspicious. The thread of our plan is tangled, but we may untangle it yet. That silly old hypochondriac may be persuaded, or frightened into keeping his engagement; and the girl may grow weary of her second lover and return to her first.”

“If Frances has wavered, though but for a moment, she shall not be my bride,” answered Greville sternly, looking up with an expression of the most resolute decision on lip and brow.

“Idiot! This comes of having hot, young blood,” thought Mr Hartnell; but he was cool

enough to perceive that in his present excited mood his nephew must be soothed, not thwarted, and he acted accordingly ; his pride giving way to his poliey, as it had often done before.

“ As yet you have no certainty of Miss Evelyn’s wavering. Would you, a lover, convict her on light grounds ? First prove her guilty, before you condemn her.”

“ Prove her innocent—prove her true ; and I will be as your very slave through life. That were a joy worth living—dying for.

Any other heart must have been deeply touched by this passionate appeal ; but Mr. Hartnell only saw in it a powerful feeling on which he might act, to rule the high spirit before him.

“ My endeavours shall be turned to this ; but to prove her innocent, we must show no suspicion of her falsehood. She may purpose to return the presents—she may not have known of Sir Michael’s intended visit, and have written that note only in obedience to her father’s

commands. Mrs. Margaret Evelyn vouched for her love and truth; and I would rather rely on her word than that of"—any of the party, he was going to add; but checked himself, and substituted—"her brother."

"If I could but believe this," exclaimed the impetuous Leonard, beginning once more to hope and trust.

"You may as well believe it till you know to the contrary; the truth may be soon ascertained. We will send over this evening to enquire after Mr. Evelyn's health; and the messenger shall be the bearer of letters to both father and daughter. I shall write as if merely in the course of business, stating the progress made in the settlements, submitting one or two points to his decision, and pressing for an early marriage. His reply will show whether his wish for the union is cooled or not. Do you write to Miss Evelyn, a lover's letter, if you will, full of regrets at not seeing her to-day—full of hopes of beholding her to-morrow; but

give not a hint of your doubts or fears. From her answer we may judge of the state of her mind, or heart, if you prefer it; for I doubt if she, her father, or Sir Michael himself can play the hypocrite. We will not send till dark, that they may take counsel of Mrs. Margaret, if they wish it; and Pike shall be our messenger; for, without falling into the worthless folly of punning, he is proverbially a keen observer, and may judge, from the warmth in the kitchen, how high the thermometer stands in the saloon. Your fears may be groundless; or, should it prove otherwise, Mrs. Margaret is on your side; for she was once fond of your mother; and as for Sir Michael Paulet, should he prove troublesome, a hint to the Secretary of State may give him a smaller dwelling than the Moat. From the vapouring of his foreign servant, who, I suspect, is half English after all, I judge that this stranger would little like enquiries as to the past; and, for the present, with his open house and lavish expenditure, striving to win the

hearts of all, he may be a spy and agent of the Pretender; or may be made to appear so."

"Your pardon, Sir; but this must not be," said Leonard, abruptly. "Whatever may be my feelings towards Sir Michael, and they are not over friendly, our strife must be open—our warfare honourable. My own good sword, and not a state warrant, must avenge and repair my wrongs."

Mr. Hartnell frowned, for he could ill break opposition from his nephew, whom he regarded as a dependent on his bounty; and his wordly mind saw nothing ungenerous in the mode of procedure at which he had hinted; but checking the expression of his anger, he answered calmly. "We can decide on these points hereafter: at present we have but to send our letters and await replies. Take heed that you give not a hint of your suspicions."

Leonard felt that this would be difficult, suffering so acutely from those suspicions as he did; but agreeing in his uncle's views, at least

as far as he knew them, he promised to make the attempt.

“ Do go and amuse your cousin, Nella, or he will be doing something desperate,” said Mr. Hartnell to his niece, whom he encountered in the gallery.

“ Is Leonard ill? — unhappy?” enquired Nella, anxiously.

“ Ay, ill with the intermittent fever of love: now hot—now cold; now gentle, and now furious. Better seek to bring a wild bull to reason than a lover. Well for him that I approve of his choice, or he should be back to the Netherlands to-morrow, to return when cured of his folly; or if obstinate, starve on his petty pittance. The estates are not entailed, and I may make whom I will my heir; and that heir must be ready to do my bidding in all things.”

“ What has happened, Sir?” asked Nella, briefly.

“ Could you not guess from his want of appetite at dinner, and the tempest of sighs he

have loved him better, far better ; but she is not worthy of him—she has no beauty, and no wealth."

It was with a slow and timid step that Nella entered the saloon in compliance with her uncle's command. There was no embroidery frame standing there to try and tax her fortitude, for the wedding waistcoat had been finished some days before, and Leonard had found it in his room on his return from the north. His thanks had been cold and brief, colder and briefer from the chilling constraint of her own demeanour. Day was closing in as she approached the couch on which Leonard was seated ; but even through this dusky light she could see the traces of strong emotion ; and she marked that on her entrance he had half started up, and then sank down again with a gesture of disappointment.

He had hoped to receive some message from Frances—his thoughts were with her, and not with his cousin.

Crossing the room, Nella took a seat by the moody lover, laying her hand gently on his arm to prevent his rising, as he evidently purposed.

“ Do not go, Leonard. If my presence is displeasing, I will leave you.”

“ Your presence was never displeasing in former days.”

“ And why should it be so now?”

“ Nay, Nella, ask your own heart.”

“ I do, and it cannot tell me of one cold or unkind thought towards the dear companion of my childhood.”

“ I would I could believe this, Nella; but I begin to doubt and mistrust all.”

“ Doubt not me, Leonard; doubt not me. You have known me true for years—why then mistrust me now?”

“ Once my happiness seemed your first object; now you no longer desire it.”

“ If my life can secure your happiness, take it—risk it—or embitter it if you will, though the first would be the most merciful.”

Struck with the deep and passionate earnestness of the speaker, Leonard gazed upon her in silence. The cold reproach of his manner passed away, giving place to his natural warmth.

“ Ah! Nella, if I could be quite assured that you still made my happiness your first consideration, what a relief I should find in pouring out my whole heart as in former days, when you gave me comfort, advice, and sympathy in all my boyish troubles—in all my manhood’s hopes.”

“ I do desire your happiness above all other earthly good; to doubt me is to wrong me.”

“ Do you desire my union with Frances Evelyn?”

“ If that can promote your happiness, I do.”

“ If—ah! Nella, when I poured out my whole soul to you of old—when I laid bare my whole heart, there was no if, then.”

“ When did you pour forth your whole soul ?

When did you lay bare your whole heart? Ask yourself the question; and let yourself answer truly. When did you ever breathe a hint of your love for Miss Evelyn? And yet, as you tell my uncle, you have loved her from boyhood."

"I did not understand my own feelings—I did not—I—I," stammered the blushing lover.

"You are self-convicted, Leonard."

"I am," answered her cousin frankly "You deserved my confidence, and I never considered before that you had a right to feel hurt at my having withheld it: nay, I seemed always to think, that you understood my feelings—though I cannot exactly tell why, unless it was from the loving gentleness with which you always met me on my return, yet never enquired where I had been: though I remember now, you never once named her name."

"You were mistaken; I never suspected your feelings. This silence has done much

evil, and caused much sorrow," said his cousin with a shiver, which she could not suppress.

" It has indeed, dear Nella ; for it has caused coldness, suspicion, nay almost dissension between those who have been knit together in love from their very childhood. But there shall be no more of this ; I will tell you all, as I once did ; and we will be again as we once were," said Leonard, touched by the sadness of her tone, and passing his arm round her waist caressingly, as he had been wont to do in the freedom of boyhood and cousinship. " Will you not forgive me ?" he added reproachfully, as Nella started up, drawing back from the enfolding arm and intended caress ; a caress which though he could have given as a brother, she felt that she could not have received as a sister.

" Heartily do I forgive you, Leonard, and pray that you may be blessed and happy, here and hereafter," replied his cousin, resuming her

seat, and holding out her hand, so far controlling her emotion that it trembled not at his touch, or at least so slightly that he marked it not. “ We will be again to each other as we once were—at least as far as may be, for I am no more the first to you ; but we are no longer boy and girl. The world calls us man and woman, and requires that we should act as men and women do.”

“ So be it, Nella,” answered her cousin, “ and thus I seal the bond,” raising her hand to his lips with a respect that almost equalled his affection, for there had been an earnest gravity in her tone and manner which had repressed all idea of cousinly jesting. “ The world would be right in calling you a woman ; and yet to me it seems as if you had only burst forth into womanhood within the last few days.”

“ Was I so very childish then before ?”

“ No, not childish ; never childish for your years in mind ; but lately it has seemed as if that mind had grasped a power it never had

before—as if you had assayed it, and now knew its worth and might. Even my uncle speaks of Nella's mind."

" And knows it not."

" Ay, very likely. I am not sure that I know it myself; at least I could not explain it, but I feel that I should not now think of running off with you to the mount as I did so lately."

" Ah, that run!" said Nella in a very low voice, as if speaking to herself rather than her companion.

" Ah! that run indeed, dear Nella! I cannot think of it without shame. It was that which made you so ill for days; you are not well now, and nurse Lee has looked black upon me ever since. I was selfish, thinking only of my own happiness, for I was very happy then; and now I am so wretched."

" But you will soon be happy again I trust, dear Leonard," said Nella very sweetly.

" Bless you, dear Nella, for the words; I

will receive them as a prophecy. Frances, my own beautiful Frances, cannot be false. Say that she cannot."

"Not if she ever truly loved you, Leonard."

"If—Nella—if. Why should you doubt her love? But you do not like her—you grow stiff and cold when she is named. It is foolish to look for comfort from you in this matter."

"It is unkind to doubt it, Leonard; but I have met your beautiful Frances only once; and see that she has made you unhappy," answered Nella, involuntarily laying a stress on the beautiful, and it might be speaking with a slight tinge of bitterness.

"True; and you know not even now what has passed between us, and may lay blame on her, which she does not merit. The fault may rest alone with my own fiery temper: I will tell you all."

"I know much from my uncle of that which has recently passed—tell me first of your early

feeling. He says that you boast of having loved her from boyhood."

"And so I have," said the lover colouring. "I used often when a boy to tell you of Frances Evelyn—so lovely—so gentle—so like an angel; and say that she should be my wife."

"You did; but I thought it the idle talk of a mere boy; for you were not more than ten or eleven then, and for at least three years before your departure from Flanders, her name was never mentioned. You did not even see her, I believe during that period, the family being in Devonshire, on account of Mr. Evelyn's health."

"You have a very good memory, Nella, and seem to remember everything," observed her cousin a little pettishly.

"Too good you seem to consider, Leonard. Well, I will try to forget: a good memory is not always a blessing. Would you have me believe that your love not only endured, but grew in strength during the six years that you

neither saw nor named her ; for you never wrote of her when abroad."

" I am not quite such an idiot as you would make it appear, though, perhaps, somewhat an unreasonable lover. I was older than you say when Frances went into Devonshire ; and, moreover, I spent nearly a month in her society, whilst waiting for the embarkation of my regiment for Flanders. Her brother invited me to stay at his father's house, which was only a short day's journey from our quarters ; and since then he has frequently given messages from me to his sister."

" And then it was that you first really loved."

" If you will lay no count on my boyish admiration."

" Not much, Leonard. Surely it should content you to love at nineteen. But why was I not told of this meeting ?"

" As I said before, dear Nella, I cannot tell ; and can only excuse my silence, by saying that

I was always a wretched correspondent. You know that I never write if I can help it; and then I had a feeling of embarrassment—even shame, and some sort of vague fancy that you would not be pleased."

"Why should you fancy that?" asked Nella looking away.

"I don't know, as I told you before; but I had the fancy. I remember once, when you were quite a little girl, you looked very glum when I praised the beauty and gentleness of Frances. Soon after I found you crying in a corner; and when I asked you—why, you said because I loved Frances better than you. Perhaps it was some recollection of this which caused my silence."

"I was a very little girl indeed then, Leonard, and because I had a head-ache and could not play, or talk; you said I was not half as pretty, or half as good tempered as Frances Evelyn, who looked like the angel in the large picture in the gallery, and always did

what you asked her," replied Nella colouring highly.

" Ah! so I did: I had forgotten that; but you remember every thing. Another reason for not naming her was, that having been called away in a hurry, we were not engaged, and as she was so very young, and I not very old, her brother thought one or the other might change, and did not wish our attachment made public."

" And telling it to Nella Wilmer would have been proclaiming it at St. Paul's Cross."

" No, no, dear cousin: I knew I could rely on your discretion, but I began to grow diffident, and feared being laughed at; and, as I said before, could not make up my mind to break the silence, and yet at last I fancied you must have guessed where I spent so much of my time, and why I was so little with you."

" I guessed no such thing, Leonard; and your silence was most unfortunate—I will not add most unkind, lest that should pain you. Had you trusted me, as you should have done,

with what different feelings should I have met Miss Evelyn."

"I was wrong, Nella, I admit. But you love Frances—do you not? or you will for my sake?"

"I will try to do so, Leonard."

"Try to do so! There can be little exertion needed I should think," observed the lover in a pet. "None can see Frances without admiration."

"And can we not admire without loving?—love without admiring?"

"You are getting too deep for me, Nella; enough for my poor head, that I love Frances with my whole soul; and you must, or should do the like. Her supassing loveliness makes her an object of attention, admiration, or envy, whenever she appears; and, I may boast of possessing the fairest bride in England—ay, or in Europe."

"Boast of possessing the fairest bride! Ah! such is the love of man!" thought Nella, turn-

ing away in grief, for her woman's heart felt the vanity of that love which must be fed on beauty, or the praises of a crowd.

“ You shun my look. Do you mean to say that she will never become my bride?—that she does not love me?” questioned Leonard impetuously.

“ Believe me, I meant neither: Mrs. Margaret Evelyn's word should be credited. Besides, I thought you felt assured of her affection.”

“ So I did but twelve hours since; so I will even now. Frances cannot be false. You have heard only my uncle's account, now listen to mine, unless you refuse to hear me as you did before.”

“ I was suffering then, Leonard; more, far more than you imagine; now tell me all, and I will listen patiently and earnestly, giving you good comfort and true counsel as a sister. I wish you had been my brother.”

“ I wish so too, dear Nella; but we will be friends at least. I should not have reproached

you for not listening before, since it was I who caused your head-ache."

"I have told you all, and now, Nella, give the judgment you promised. Does Frances love me? Is Frances true?" asked Leonard anxiously, as he concluded his rapid and impassioned recital. "You continue silent—speak in pity."

"She must love you, Leonard—she cannot do otherwise: and loving you once, she must love you still," answered Nella, in a husky voice, without raising her head.

"You are a sweet comforter indeed, dear Nella," exclaimed the delighted Leonard. "And you feel nearly as much as I do."

"Quite as much."

"And yet I thought you grown cold and unkind. How shall I repair this wrong?"

"Never think me cold, or unkind again."

"I never will."

Alas! alas! for the reliance to be placed upon the promises of man.

“ Nella is no fool. She can do much when she sets her mind to it,” said Mr. Hartnell to himself, as he looked into the room, and saw the cousins seated side by side, and the face of the before moody lover bright with increasing hope.

The uncle, without disturbing them, passed on to his own study, having given orders that the letters from the Grange should be first brought to him.

## CHAPTER X.

NELLA's soothing sympathy had calmed the lover's restlessness, and he bore the protracted absence of Solomon with unusual patience. Perhaps as the time drew nearer, when his doubts must be confirmed or refuted, those doubts grew stronger, and he almost dreaded lest the before desired communication should blight the hopes in which he had been indulging.

Supper was announced, and supper passed almost in silence. Even Mr. Hartnell eat little, and said less; and his nephew and niece

were equally deficient in appetite and conversation.

“Here he is,” said Leonard, starting up, then sinking down again, whilst Solomon’s slow and measured step across the hall gave notice of the return of the messenger.

“Have you a note? How slow you have been,” exclaimed the eager Leonard, springing forward as Solomon opened the door, hope once again preponderating.

“Job’s post always travels too fast,” answered Solomon gravely.

“Give me the note,” said Leonard impatiently.

Solomon presented a sealed packet, but it was addressed to Mr. Hartnell, not Captain Greville.

“You may go now: I will ring when I want you,” said Mr. Hartnell as he received the packet from his disappointed nephew.

“When you have arrived at years of discre-

tion, Leonard, you will understand the wisdom of keeping open ears and prying eyes at a distance," observed Mr. Hartnell, as Solomon closed the door behind him. " You are apt to speak unadvisedly, and a rash word reported might do you more harm in a day than you could repair in a year."

Leonard made no reply, but stood watching his uncle with undisguised impatience, looking as though his eyes could pierce through the envelope, and read its contents. It seemed a century at least ere the cover was broken open. A note from within fell to the ground.—Leonard snatched it up with a gleam of triumphant joy—it was from Frances.

Tearing it open he ran eagerly, pantingly, over the contents ; and, as he did so, the crimson flush of excitement gave place to a deathly paleness. At first he doubted whether he fully understood the meaning of the words which he had read, for the letters seemed to dance before

his eyes ; then the hateful truth grew clearer and clearer, till, dizzy with the shock, he caught at the mantelpiece for support.

“ Knav or fool ?—perhaps both,” muttered Mr. Hartnell as he reached the last word of the note, which he had been reading too intently to think of his nephew.

“ What does he say ?” enquired Leonard with a voice that startled his uncle.

“ What you are not equal to bear just now. Drink this glass of wine,” replied Mr. Hartnell, for the moment thinking only of the corpse-like looking being before him.”

“ I can bear any thing. Let me know all at once,” gasped the outraged lover.

“ There is the note then ; but sit you down first. Read it : and then we will consult together on what is to be done. We may win the game yet ; or perhaps I had better read it aloud, for your eyes look glazed.”

“MY DEAR SIR,

“I beg to thank you for the information concerning the progress of the settlements, and regret that circumstances render their speedy completion a matter of less anxiety now than a few weeks since. My health having become so very precarious, that I feel the need of a daughter's care, I cannot, at present, make up my mind to resign her to another, and Frances, ever dutiful and affectionate, will devote herself to a dying parent. I must apologise to you and Captain Greville for suddenly destroying hopes so lately sanctioned; but events are beyond my control, and I must submit. Discussion, where there can be no change, would be useless, and to continue his visits under such altered circumstances, would be equally painful to Captain Greville and my child. Excuse me, therefore, if I decline all further intercourse for the present; hereafter another course may be pursued, should your nephew's wishes remain the same; but time and

absence may render him indifferent to that which he now desires, and it may be better for all should this come to pass. I cannot conclude without repeating my regret at the necessity of coming to such a decision. With every good wish, and the highest esteem for yourself and nephew,

“ I remain yours truly,

“ THOMAS EVELYN.”

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“ Now let me read the daughter’s note, and then I shall be able to form a better judgment,” said Mr. Hartnell, in a cool, business tone.

Leonard permitted his uncle to take the note from his hand, scarcely conscious of what he did, and Mr. Hartnell proceeded to read that also aloud, after adjusting his spectacles.

“ Do not blame me, dear Leonard; do not think me cold or fickle if I acquiesce in my father’s wish, that for a time we shall be to each other, at least in outward seeming, only as friends. It is his desire—most earnest desire; and broken as he is in health and spirits, I must not refuse him. I cannot leave him, and dare not cross him. Let us hope that, by Heaven’s blessing on my watchful care and love, he may soon again be restored to health, and then we shall be happy once more. Think, if this letter pain you in the reading, how much, how very much more it must pain me to write it. I am hurried, and scarcely know what I say; but you will understand all I would tell you—all I would ask of you. Forgive me if I cause you sorrow—be sure I more than share it—and oh! believe, dear Leonard, let what will come to pass, that

“ I am still, and ever will be,

“ Yours, and yours only,

“ FRANCES EVELYN.”

“ Rather more sentimental than her father’s letter, certainly. The old fool has frightened her by a threat of dying, and she is too timid and simple-minded to resist such a threat. I will just read it over again; something may be done with her.”

“ No, no,” cried Leonard to whom his uncle’s cold, hard tone whilst reading, and subsequent business like remark had been agony, snatching away the note and thrusting it into his bosom.

At any other time Mr. Hartnell would have been offended, and justly so at this rude abruptness; but he saw that Leonard was too much excited to be rebuked, or judged critically, and forbore noticing conduct, which he would otherwise have resented. His next observations referred to the note of the father, instead of the daughter.

“ This note is not at all in Mr. Evelyn’s usual style; it is far too decided and resolute: it may be his hand, but here are signs of the head of another. That feeble vacillating mind

is under the influence of a master spirit ; and here is nothing of Mr. Evelyn, but the half-formed letters of a trembling hand."

" It is Sir Michael Paulet ! he shall rue it," burst from the livid lips of Leonard, in a tone which startled and alarmed his hearers.

" Don't be rash, Leonard," said Mr. Hartnell, with more feeling than usual, keeping down his own anger, not to increase that of his nephew, which already threatened evil consequences. " I may be mistaken. These weak nervous people sometimes take most desperate resolutions, in which cases they are generally very obstinate in maintaining them ; still much may be done as you have given no personal offence : let us consider the matter coolly."

" I cannot be cool under such suffering," exclaimed Leonard passionately.

" I know that, to my cost," thought Mr. Hartnell, but his own coolness enabled him to perceive the folly of attempting to check his

nephew's passion in its full career. "Let it spend itself in words, lest it should burst forth in deeds."

"You will be calmer to-morrow; we will talk it all over then," he observed more gently.

"No, to-night, I must question Solomon to-night," answered Leonard abruptly.

"I will ring for him," said Mr. Hartnell, seeing that Leonard was resolute, and deeming it better to be present at this questioning, since he could not delay it.

It had been Mr. Hartnell's intention to question Solomon alone, and tutor him as to what he should say, and what he should not say to his young master, but this Leonard's impetuosity effectually prevented.

Solomon Pike appeared with the air of one who had valuable intelligence to communicate, and was resolved to be treated as a person of importance; but the times were not propitious to his pretensions.

"This is no moment for idle proverbs, or a

waste of words, so answer briefly, Solomon ; and above all answer truly," said Mr. Hartnell, who had not failed to mark the self-sufficient air of his nephew's serving-man. " We do not wish conjectures—but facts."

Solomon bowed respectfully, though inwardly much affronted ; but he knew from experience that Mr. Hartnell would be obeyed, and must not be trifled with when in his present mood. He was a cold, harsh man, who had no respect for proverbs, thinking his own sayings wiser than those of others, and utterly impenetrable to any allusion about saving the life of Leonard's father. Such was Solomon's conclusion, and Solomon's conclusion was not far from the truth.

Mr. Hartnell, however, was not ignorant of the effects of flattery, and having established his grand propositions of brevity of speech, and the absence of proverbs, enforced by a glance at the haggard countenance of his nephew, he proceeded more graciously, throwing in a little

praise to secure the serving-man from being too silent or sulky.

“ You are a keen observer, Solomon, and have your young master’s interest at heart, and therefore I sent you to the Grange in preference to another. Tell us only what you deem important, as the subject is painful, and not to be dwelt on. Has Mrs. Margaret Evelyn returned from her morning’s visit?”

“ There is no likelihood of her being back at the Grange, sir, for some time. An express met her on the road to say that her cousin, and most particular friend, Mrs. Walters, was very ill, and she is gone into Oxfordshire as fast as horses can take her.”

A sudden gesture shewed Leonard’s vexation; he had counted much on that lady’s intercession. Mr. Hartnell too was annoyed, though he made no remark.

“ Is Mr. Evelyn very ill?”

“ He is very nervous and fidgety, the servants say, and shakes like a willow at every

noise ; but he does not look thinner, and seems to walk very well, as far as I could judge."

" You saw him then ?"

" Only for a minute like, sir, as Bessy Wilson was showing me something in the front hall."

" Who is Bessy Wilson, and what was she showing you in the front hall ?"

" Bessy Wilson, sir, is the housekeeper's niece, and a very pretty, nice mannered sort of a girl ; nothing of a jilt like Martha Sturt. To my mind Miss Evelyn would do wiser if she took her for her waiting woman. She was showing me the foreign wonders that Sir Michael Paulet sent over to the Grange as presents :—cabinets and such things."

" Have they not been returned ?" inquired Leonard hastily.

" No, sir, nor like to be, for the whole household, from the saloon to the kitchen, is clean gone mad after Sir Michael and his cut-throat serving-man, except Bessy Wilson ; and she

has sense enough to prefer a good sober Englishman."

" That is, she looks with favor on Solomon Pike," observed Mr. Hartnell, who was anxious to prevent further queries from his nephew, and saw in this flirtation a prospect of future advantage.

" Just so, sir," answered Pike with a solemn simper. " A wise choice shows a good understanding."

Mr. Hartnell's manœuvre was useless. Leonard was resolved to know all, and at once.

" Was Sir Michael at the Grange when you left it?"

" Yes, sir; and his serving-man Carlos too, flirting away with Martha Sturt, and she tossing her head, and giggling, and turning up her nose like a minx, no better than she should be. Like master, like man—like mistress, like maid."

" What mean you?" asked Leonard stamping with impatience. " Does Frances—does Miss Evelyn show favor to Sir Michael?"

“No little favor, sir, if we may believe Martha Sturt. Sir Michael has been there all day, walking and talking with Miss Evelyn.”

“Alone?” questioned Leonard, setting his teeth, and clenching his fist.

“I cannot say that, sir, not having seen them together,” answered Solomon, warned by a glance from Mr. Hartnell not to irritate Leonard farther. “Miss Evelyn was not with Sir Michael when I saw him in the hall.”

“How is Miss Evelyn?”

“Well, sir: quite well and happy, according to her saucy waiting woman,” answered Solomon, whose desire to vent his own vexation in abuse of Martha was sadly at war with Mr. Hartnell’s warning looks.

“Did she take her place at the supper table after receiving my note?”

“So Mrs. Martha informed me with a toss of the head, having been handed in by Sir Michael just before I quitted the house.”

“I will see her—question her—upbraid her,” exclaimed Leonard starting up.

“ Not to-night, Leonard; it is too late. Take time to consider; decide on nothing till to-morrow,” said Mr. Hartnell with what he considered an exceedingly soothing manner.

“ To-morrow be it, then: I will defer my visit no longer. I will hear what she has to say; and then, if she be really false, give her up for ever.”

“ Better do so, sir, at once, and look out for another love,” observed Solomon Pike, whose vanity, wounded by the coquetry of Martha, had been balmed by the favor of Bessy. “ It is vain to whistle back hawk or woman once given to straying. And for the matter of seeing Miss Evelyn, that may be sooner said than done; for all the servants have positive orders to admit no one but Sir Michael Paulet.”

“ And he may not live to claim admission. I will see Miss Evelyn, or her father. They dare not shut the door in my face.”

“ They will, sir. Sir Michael’s gold has turned all but Bessy Wilson.”

“ I care not if strong walls and a whole host were against me : I will see Frances Evelyn, or die in the attempt. Let those look to themselves who dare oppose me.” cried Leonard passionately, glancing at his uncle and Solomon.

“ I will rather further your wishes, Leonard ; only be cool and let us consult on the best plan to pursue.”

“ Cool, uncle!—cool to-night ! Why my very brain is on fire.”

“ I see it is ; and therefore would have you defer all thought till to-morrow, when I will myself go early to the Grange, and demand an interview with Mr. Evelyn. Should he see me he may yield to my persuasions ; should he refuse me admittance, I will then give you my aid in your endeavours to meet his daughter.”

“ Thank you,” cried Leonard grasping his hand with an energy which bespoke the strength of his gratitude.

“ But I will only do so on one condition, Leonard ; namely, that you avoid Sir Michael,

and seek no quarrel should you meet him accidentally."

"I will do as you wish, sir, till after to-morrow ; then, should he still stand in my way, I shall hold myself free to chastise his insolence."

"I hope to-morrow will see every thing arranged as we desire," replied his uncle evasively. "And now Solomon you may retire. Bid the groom bring my horse to the door immediately after breakfast, and hold yourself in readiness to accompany me ; but tell no one whither I go, or aught of your visit to-night ; I know we may trust to your discretion."

"That you may, sir. A man that knows how to speak, knows also when to be silent," replied Solomon Pike, as he withdrew, delighted with Mr. Hartnell's unusual graciousness, and the opportunity of ending with a proverb.

"And now good night, Leonard, for I shall to bed to sleep off all unpleasant news, and gain strength for to-morrow ; and I should

advise you to follow my example," said Mr. Hartnell, who deemed it most prudent to hold no further conversation with his nephew, that night, his mood being far too fiery to admit of his forming a reasonable judgment.

"Good night, sir; I shall soon follow," answered Leonard, adding in an under tone—"but not to sleep."

"He may talk to Nella, if he will; and she may teach him reason," said Mr. Hartnell to himself, as he quitted the room. "I am obliged to conceal my own anger at the insult that I may not increase his fury. That such a red-hot youth should be my nephew. Had I another, with a cooler head, he should not be my heir. This matter of the wedding looks unpromising; but I may frighten the father and circumvent the rival yet."

And where had Nella been during all this scene? What part had she taken in this discussion? None. There she was, still leaning back in her chair, pale, silent, and half fainting,

with her hands clasped on her bosom, and her eyes fixed upon Leonard. Once, when his very lips had grown white with agony, she had half started up; but the body had been weaker than the mind, and she had sunk down again, too faint to move. No one had seen this—no one had thought of her. Leonard had thought only of Frances—Mr. Hartnell only of increasing the family wealth—she was alone, and apart among her kindred—no longer the first even in the heart of the loved companion of her childhood. She had been hardly tried before that day; but this was harder still to bear—yet make no sign. The sudden flashing of wild hope, and then the deadening gloom of doubt, and dread, and fear, and shame. And then her sorrow with the heart that sorrowed; although his anguish was the deepest pang of all.

None looked upon the pale and fainting girl—none saw her move her lips in prayer, nor marked the struggle till she stood the master of her feelings, not their slave.

When her uncle's departing footsteps were no longer heard, she crossed the room, and stood by her cousin's side. He did not look up—he did not seem conscious that she was standing beside him; but started as she spoke.

“ Leonard—dear Leonard.”

Never were tones more full of pity and affection.

“ Speak not to me thus: your pity tells me what a wretch I am. Rather be gay and jest, that I may doubt the truth of my own ears—the evidence of my own eyes,” cried Leonard wildly. “ She is not false. She is too lovely to be false. You said but now she was not false. Say so again! Swear it, that I may give you credit.”

“ Hush! hush! you know not what you say.”

“ True, Nella, true. Your tones are so like hers when she received my vows—so soft—so sweet, I cannot hear them and not think of her. And you are pale, too—deadly pale, like a fresh corpse just arisen from the grave; and yet with

something resolute I cannot understand. You tremble—and yet there are no tears. But you feel for me, Nella—I see you do," he added, taking her cold, white hand in his.

" I do, indeed. It is a fearful thing to love and not to be loved."

" But I am loved, Nella—dearly loved. Tell me not otherwise, lest I go mad. This is some mistake—fear for her father's health—a fancied duty—that is all. You judge her hastily."

" Now God forgive me, if I do," said Nella very humbly.

" That low, soft voice again. Why do you speak so like my Frances? Yes, my Frances, still—no one shall tear her from me. But I cannot talk, even to you to-night," he added in a husky voice. " I would be alone. God bless you, Nella, for your love and pity. Pray for my happiness—I have a fancy that your prayers will be received. And now, good night."

Before his cousin could reply he had departed, and she was left alone. She counted his steps

up the fine old oaken staircase, that creaked beneath his hurried tread—she listened to the closing of his door, then, drawing a deep, long breath, she covered her face with her spread hands.

As she entered her sleeping chamber the rays of the moon, streaming in through an uncurtained window, made a path of light across the floor. She started; and then her whole face brightened as at some hopeful omen. Closing the door with a noiseless hand, for the stillness was soothing to her troubled spirit, she walked up the line of silver light, and looked out on the soft, grey sky. In all the heavens there was but the crescent moon, and one single star, like a timid, humble maiden waiting upon some beloved one. She looked from the one to the other, till she fancied the moon shed a softer light as it turned towards the star; and that the star looked brighter in her joy. It was a simple, silly fancy, but it made her glad, and she continued to gaze on.

A snowy cloud passed from the moon across  
the star. Had it gone on a message of love?

Her heart beat wildly at the thought. Where  
was the mastery which she had so lately gained?  
The victor was the vanquished now.

“ If she should prove untrue—if he should  
turn for consolation to—” the whisper died  
away—even the air caught not the closing  
word. She paused, then added in a wild, re-  
pentant tone, “ but he would suffer from her  
falsehood; and he bade me pray for him.”

“ What are you doing, darling?” enquired  
Nurse Lee, as she entered the room.

“ Praying that Leonard may be happy; and  
do you, nurse, do the like.”

Nurse did not answer, but she turned away  
with swimming eyes.

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